Life Portraits in the Surrealist Art of

FRIDA KAHLO

and

REMEDIOS VARO

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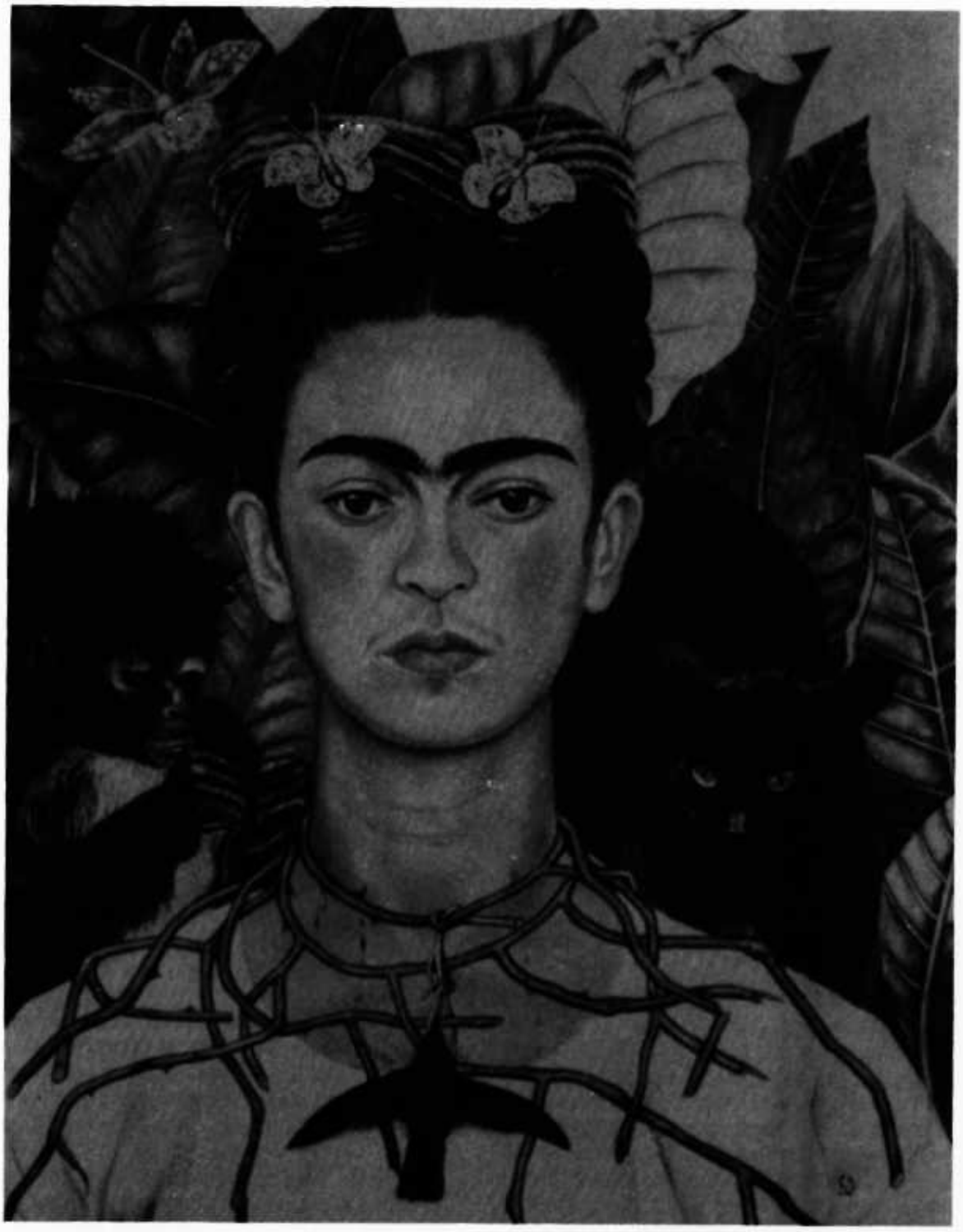
Although the Surrealist movement idolized the cult of the woman-child or "femme-enfant" and the myth of woman as muse rather than creative force in her own right, and even though, until recently, texts on Surrealism tended to mention only one woman (Meret Oppenheim, celebrated by the male Surrealists for her Fur-lined Teacup) as a Surrealist artist, the fact is that no artistic movement prior to Surrealism had such a large number of active women participants (Chadwick, 1985, 7). These women were able to contradict the male surrealists' images of women distorted, dismembered, dehumanized, with images by women, and to face the difficult and multifaceted quest for self-identity and artistic form within a movement which linked woman's creative powers to immaturity and the role of muse. Many women who chose to work in a Surrealist vein viewed themselves, and indeed functioned as, artists separate from the Breton Circle, which perpetuated Romantic and late Nineteenth Century polarized views of woman as either virgin/child/celestial creature, or as sorceress/erotic object (Chadwick, 1).

I would like in this paper to examine both sides of this coin: first, I will consider briefly how male artists of the movement channeled their disparate ideas regarding women; second, I will discuss women's images of themselves. Of the several women included in Surrealist exhibitions, I will, for the scope of this discussion, limit myself to two Latin American artists who created their own images: Frida Kahlo and Remedios Varo. Doubly marginalized, as women and as Latin American artists, Kahlo and Varo ably defied, through their work, appropriation of their lives, identities, and creativity. This focus on Kahlo and Varo is not to suggest, of course, a lack of interest in the work of other women who



Self Portrait, 1940 oil on canvas FRIDA KAHLO

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worked in a surrealist vein. Indeed, two of them, Leonor Fini and Leonora Carrington, will also figure briefly in this discussion.

To turn now to how the male surrealists channeled their notions regarding women, even a brief glance at a few of their most telling titles and works will illustrate that the prevailing attitude was not an erotics of mutual exchange, but instead of the dominator (objectifier) and the dominated (objectified). Women in the confining roles allotted them by their objectifiers could not claim their own sexuality. Rather woman's exposure was not a matter of her own sexuality, but of the sexuality of the observer. Indeed, women literally and figuratively have embodied men's erotic desires and imagination, which manifest themselves in various modes and themes: confinement, fragmentation, dismemberment, immaturity and eventual self-objectification are foremost among them, as the first part of this analysis will show.

Consider, for example, Duchamp's nude entitled Etant données, a case in point of the lack of reciprocal erotic exchange: the plural suggests how very much is given, as Mary Ann Caws so astutely points out (1986, 97). On an obviously more severe level in terms of the confinement of women, the repeated impulse to contain them (lest they escape? or, at least, become "free?") materializes in a violent, penetrating, piercing fixation on women as entrapped, restricted, mutilated. Andre Masson's 1938 Mannequin is one poignant illustration: the woman's head is imprisoned in a bird cage (because "wild" or "flighty"?), her face exactly enclosed in the cage door (as a tease to the futility of her even thinking about escape); that which mutes her verbally also inhibits her gesturally (i.e., similar obstructive objects appear in her mouth, under her arms). "Fait accompli": the woman is silenced in mind and body. The peacock-type ornament, its plumes in the shape of fallopian tubes, hides her "ornament," while her breasts appear disproportionate, making of her body a lopsided mockery. Significantly, she, to our knowledge, has no bodily hair, perhaps because -- as Berger interestingly argues (1972, Ch. 1) -- the observer treasures his monopoly on sexual power and passion (of which bodily hair is symbolic) over and beyond that allotted to any woman's objectified person. Left deprived of any of her resources, then, this de-personalized, de-feminized "objet d'art" has no rule or option except (en)forced submission.

The downsloped shoulders and somewhat resentful expression of the nameless face of Man Ray's untitled live model (1930) indicates the same option -- NO option, except sexual oppression. As prey, woman is captured in a cage-like net. Her upper torso, like the rest of her self, is "stripped." And in other increasingly problematic surrealist works, woman is stripped of more than her clothes, freedom, and dignity. She is grotesquely disfigured, dismembered, displaced, violated, and undone. On a less offensive level than Man Ray, Magritte held a particular fascination for the eye (for example, The Eye, The False Mirror, The Portrait); Duchamp and Eluard, for the breast, Ernst, for clasped hands and wide-open eyes. Hans Bellmer treated the female body as a lifeless rag doll. Violently attacking the integrity of the entire female body, he arranged dolls into frankly erotic (de-?/re-?) constructions which are lewd and cruel, in honest tribute to the writings of Sade which "inspired" them. If woman is inflicted with debility, the ability she had possessed is no longer a threat. Men can manipulate her, as Bellmer's series of positions indicates.

And Man Ray's famous Erotique-voilée is, as its title suggests, also indicative of an eroticism which is, at best, dubious. The ink or grease from the wheel smeared on model Meret Oppenheim's arm shows that this is a "marked" woman. The wheel or its spokes seem to catch each of her most sensitive/sensual body parts (pubis, breast, and underarm look almost "caught" as the foreboding spoke with teeth approaches). (Caws has noted that the modern female is depicted here as re-reading herself as if on/by a printing press, as is jointly suggested by the machine and the woman's possibly self-scrutinizing expression). In the "uncropped" version of this photograph ("uncropped" itself an ambiguous subtitle, the implications of which are entertaining), the phallic handle juts out as the appendage it is, thus causing Meret Oppenheim's facial expression to take on new possible meanings as well: Is she a spectator of herself, or of the wheel as manifestation of her other?[1] (Here again, Caws offers an incisive interpretation, 1984, 255-60.)

In a much less ambiguous fashion, Magritte in Les Liaisons Dangereuses (reportedly based on LaClos's novel) depicts woman watching herself. But here she is divided and deformed, as implied by the disproportionate

juxtaposition of actual and mirrored images. She herself seems to be hiding from her own reflection which is not only reversed/reversible, but also inescapable. Inescapable or inevitable, too, are the self-loathing and shame that come with the realization of oneself as unpleasant sight. Woman becomes implicated, thus, in her own object-ness and observation of an objectified self as dictated by men.

Such a collusion is the case when we , especially women, "observe" the restrictive containment of a woman's (again, hairless and as such sexually powerless) mid-section in Representation. About this work, Mary Ann Caws insightfully writes: "the heavy framing of the central part of a woman's body...[says] it all by saying only some, forcing the reader to remember and re-collect, that is, to re-present" (1985, 255). Such a critique is indicative of the dis-membering that must needs be "re-paired" in, fittingly, a dual sense: to literally make reparations for damages imag(in)ed and incurred, and to match or pair up the unnaturally dissociated fragments with that which is absent. An even more grotesque version of woman's dismembering non-entity/nonwholeness in the eyes of male surrealists is Magritte's La Lumiere des Coincidences. All the candle sheds light on in this de-presentation of a female torso with stumps is that woman is decapitated and debilitated--a paraplegic sex object, without limbs, without mind, without face.

Frida Kahlo's self-portraits provide a startling and challenging contrast to these works. She participated in Surreal exhibits and was outstanding (while standing apart from the Breton circle), both in her giftedness and in the independent spirit of her work. Born in 1910 in Coyoacan, a suburb of Mexico City, she was the daughter of a German-Jewish immigrant photographer father and a Mexican mother. A near-fatal bus accident in 1925 injured her pelvis and spine, nearly crippled her, increasingly debilitated her, and led to over 50 operations and a lifetime of pain. While initially convalescing, Kahlo taught herself to paint. As an exemplar of, in Breton's words, "that magic point of intersection between the political and the artistic," this Mexican painter joined the Communist Party late in the 1920's, at which point she met renowned muralist Diego Rivera, whom she married for the first time in 1929 and with whom she attempted many times and unsuccessfully to have a child.

Though Breton claimed her as a Surrealist in 1939, and (with Duchamp) arranged her first Paris exhibition in 1940, Kahlo thought of herself as a Mexican artist and a realist. (Her first major exhibition in Mexico, however, did not take place until 1953, a year before her death.) She found Breton's theorizing pretentious, boring, vain, and arrogant (Chadwick, 87), and made her own life the source of her art. The 1931 painting Frida and Diego reflects her commitment to her marriage with Rivera. Her anguish over his divorcing her is depicted in the 1939 work, The Two Fridas. This dual self portrait suggests her inner strength in the face of the loss of Rivera: she (the one Diego loved) is connected to herself (the one he did not love) by joint bleeding hearts which lead to a picture of a child. Her experience then is one of having loved and nurtured her husband who, now, has been severed from her life-line in significantly umbilical fashion (for she is shown trying to stay the blood by the use of forceps).

As this and other paintings reiterate, Kahlo was without doubt in tune with the fluid nature of woman's existence and imagination, and the relation of such fludity/liquidity to woman's ability to give birth to (or impose death upon?) ideas, the imagination, love, and life itself. Consider her painting What the Water Gave Me (1930). Water, a medium of birth as well as a mystical signifier of the unconscious, brings Kahlo's mental life into being here. This mental life is a whirlpool of diverse images, some of which affirm life and love: herself and Diego, as well as a miniversion of her painting Two Nudes (both women); the growth of sea life generated from her own pubis (the leaves of which interestingly form variously shaped lips and thus imply women's/her facial images in the water). Still other images are deathly: the dead hummingbird which she apparently identified with herself (as will later be shown); the skeleton; the discarded dress which has left her greyish corpse naked in the center of the painting -- as if it has been strangled by an intricate web or tightrope which she is no longer able to balance upon, since it is pulled by a masked man and hooked to the bathtub's drain plug. Yet, at the same time, this plug also reveals that these images, perhaps surfacing from the unconscious, are in the bathtub where water is a means of cleansing and purifying oneself; hence the positive, life-preserving images. Evidently, though, this plug implies death as

well, in a very literal sense allowing life to go "down the drain." Perhaps this is how Kahlo felt, considering the debilitating accident and resultant severe handicap which restricted, defined, preoccupied her life and much of her work from early adolescence on. The agonizing pain of her crushed spine and broken foot (which is also among the images in What the Water Gave Me) is most poignantly portrayed in The Broken Column (1944), which parades both her exquisite beauty and her overwhelming suffering and martyrdom as the rose among the thorns.

It is as though painting to explore the reality of her own body and her consciousness of it resulted in troublesome/troubling dualities. These autobiographical self-portraits are attempts to resolve polarities of the inner and outer worlds. But interpreters like Andre Breton, for example, preferred to see her as confirming or, at worst, subverting, his surrealist principles, rather than initiating her own. (He used What the Water Gave Me, for instance, to illustrate his essay on her in Surrealism and Painting (141-45), noting that it was reminiscent of one of Nadja's phrases: "I am the thought on the bath in the room without windows.") His patronizing, albeit sincere, introduction to the New York debut of her work in 1938 is even more typical of how men value (only?) women's work which they think supports some "a priori" theoretical agenda they've constructed, so long as it does not (threaten to) expand or (re)shape such an agenda:

> *My surprise and joy were unbounded when I discovered on my arrival in Mexico, that her work had blossomed forth, in her latest paintings, into pure surreality, despite the fact that it had been conceived without any prior knowledge whatsoever of the ideas motivating the activities of my friends and myself* (Chadwick, 90).

Exploring such self-centered male judgments, Hayden Herrera suggests in her biography of Kahlo how male surrealists were attracted to Kahlo due to a "sorceress-type quality" (sic) (Breton's "beaute' du diable," no doubt), and even egotistically claimed that her exoticism was a role she consciously played to attract attention (cited in Chadwick, 90). Levy described her thus: "a kind of mythical creature, not of this world," (90). Ironically, the painting to which these men most often referred to support their claims, Self-Portrait (1940), suggests from a feminist perspective quite a different meaning, which, for them, would be most unsettling. While the painting, like photographs of Kahlo, leaves no uncertainty as to her striking beauty, its autobiographical significance lies far beyond its attractive "skin-deep" surface. The dead hummingbird hangs above her heart, from the thorns which pierce her (as they did Christ?--for she is certainly a martyr-figure in many of her works); they penetrate her body as did the body brace she had to wear. She seems to be satirizing the simplistic, romanticized version of woman as nature goddess and mythic interpretation of women's lunar and reproductive cycles. This self-portrait subverts that cyclical drama of life and death by juxtaposing the much alive foliage and resurrected/renewed life of the butterflies (associated with her head and mind) with the blood and the dead bird, for which the black cat has a predatory stare, while the jungle monkey is braiding the thorns which choke off her life. (Perhaps the latter is indicative of how she viewed the male medical establishment which "stitched her up" and left her scarred in more ways than one for the remainder of her life.) [2] Yet Kahlo is the rose among the thorns, the beauty among the beasts. While she often mocked the male appropriation of woman as mythical or nature goddess (in, for example, Self-Portrait) due to its potential for denying women's reality, she recognized women's connectedness to and connections with nature and claimed as her own those motifs which she felt were more real. For instance, lunar (feminine) and solar (masculine) polarities (as the ancient Mexican myth to which Kahlo subscribed would have them) hold shocking implications in Tree of Hope (1946), another painting showing her at the mercy of the male medical profession, as well. The wounded Kahlo has turned her exposed, scarred, bleeding back on it, while her more sensual, confident side, drawing strength and light from the female moon, can with determination face life head-on, in spite of the brace which, significantly, she is holding (rather than it "holding her"). Hence, she can optimistically affirm: "Tree of Hope, keep firm," as the banner which she serenely holds proclaims.

The intertwining cycle of birth, suffering and death is portrayed in My Birth (1932). While she is being born, her mother is covered, as

Born Again, 1960, oil on canvas

REMEDIOS VARO

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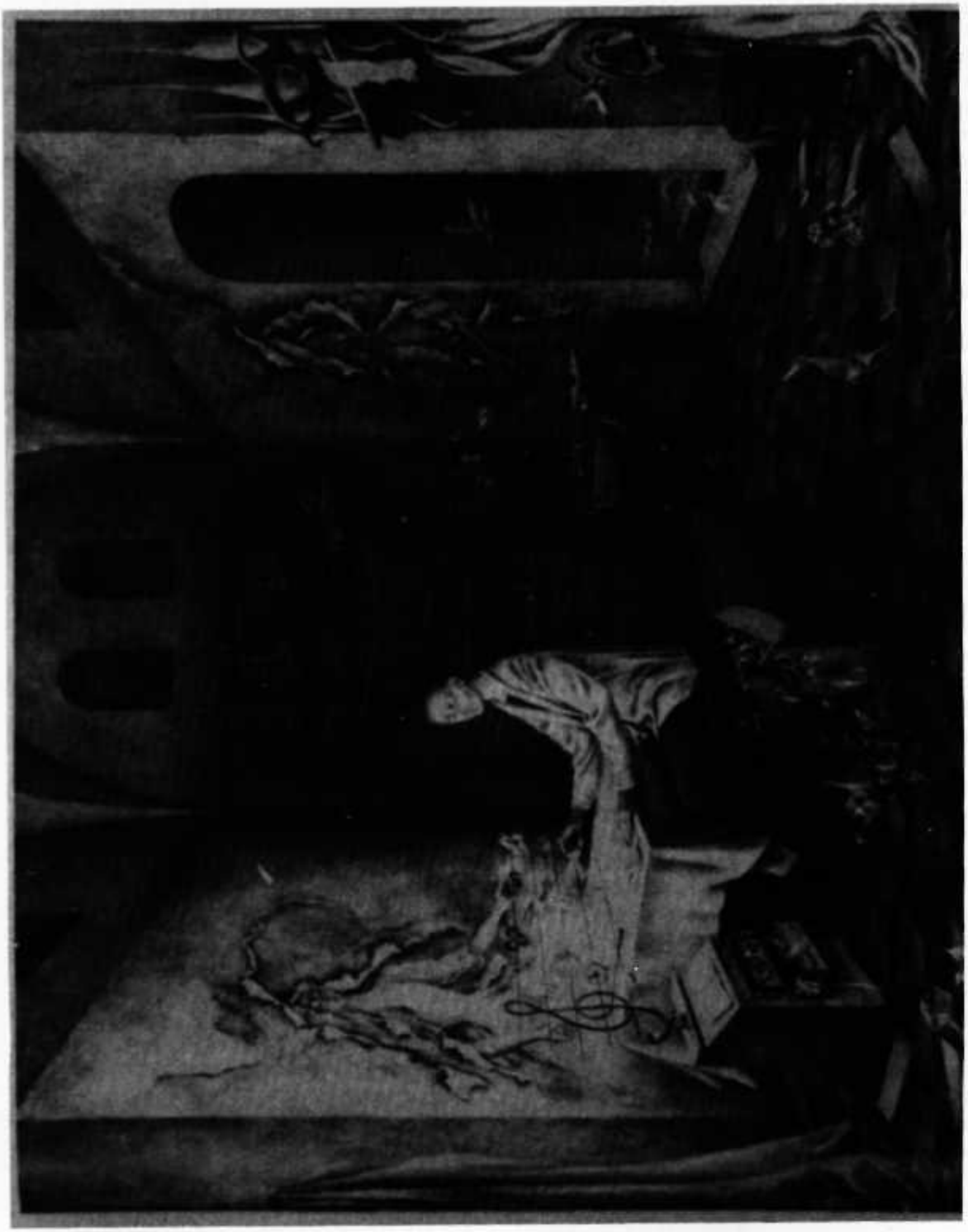

Harmony, 1956 oil on canvas

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REMEDIOS VARO

though dead, or perhaps to suggest the loss or transference of identity when, in childbirth, another being becomes an extension of the self and often takes precedence over the self. The pained, madonna-like expression centered above the bed is further evidence of the self-sacrificing nature of women's life(-giving) experiences. Woman as the center of fertile eroticism presents itself again in her Boots (1943); this time her own physical reality subsumes her identity with nature, as the vascular system of her own body intertwines with that of the plants. The intersection between barren and fertile nature has woman nourishing the earth, not vice-versa, for her blood causes leaves to sprout from her veins. Perhaps this is a parallel of or a compensation for her inability to bring to fruition her own fertility, as it were. For Kahlo had an abortion in 1932 and, in a lithograph that year, depicted the agonizing decision by posit(ion)ing herself between a palette and a fetus, hence evoking the standard opposition between creation and procreation. A second pregnancy that year ended in a miscarriage, portrayed in Henry Ford Hospital (1933). Here, she lies -- again, bleeding on white sheets -- in a mental chaos of thoughts such as the fetus (she would attempt three more times, unsuccessfully, to sustain a pregnancy), the barren pelvis (metaphorized in the barren, cracked earth of her paintings which followed), the ambiguously protected yet protruding and thus vulnerable snail from its shell (symbolic of her in her brace?). In each, the red and green accents of blood and rebirth are enacted in the drama of her pain-ting. Such painting was in fact the source of her healing, as she verbalized shortly thereafter: "My painting carries within it the message of pain...painting completed by life. I lost three children....Paintings substituted for all this. I believe that work is the best thing" (Herrera, 148). Further testimony to the healing power of her painting can be found in her continued devotion to art, in spite of the many obstacles beyond her control: her last work was done from a wheelchair after her leg had been amputated. It should not surprise us, then, that she is lauded as the Patron Saint (La Patrona) of women artists (Petersen, 135).

Remedios Varo is another Latin American artist whose works are tellingly autobiographical, but are more collaboratively than individually so; i.e., her genuine friendship with Leonora Carrington -- similar to that of Leonor Fini and Carrington -- led to collaborative efforts to develop a new pictorial language that spoke more directly to their own needs as women (Chadwick, 194, 196).[3] As with Kahlo, for Varo autobiographical details were the source for images and symbols in her work. Born in Angles, Spain, in 1913, she was the youngest of three children and the only girl. She was raised in a conservative Catholic family and strictly conventional Spanish tradition, educated first in convent schools and then in traditional art academies (Kaplan, 1988, Chapter 1); thus she rebelled against stifling group regimentation and pursued her beliefs in magic and her animistic faith in the power of objects and the connectedness between plant, animal, human and mechanical worlds. Travels throughout Spain and North Africa with her hydraulic engineer father (who tutored her in mechanical drawing) fostered a fascination with fantastic means of locomotion. (Chadwick, 243)

Because the entire body of her mature work was done while she lived in Mexico (1942-1963), Remedios Varo is considered a Mexican artist. There, according to Chadwick (196), she and her first husband, Benjamin Peret, joined a group of expatriate painters and writers which soon included Leonora Carrington, who had moved to within a few blocks from them in 1941. Having once been old friends in France, Varo and Carrington developed a close emotional and spiritual relationship in Mexico, seeing each other almost daily, as Carrington claimed in a 1984 interview with Chadwick, to whom she recalled, "Remedios' presence in Mexico changed my life" (cited, 194).

Much of the work, especially between 1940 and 1944, of Anglo-American artist Leonora Carrington (whose husband Max Ernst left her for Peggy Guggenheim) depicts the pain of thwarted love and her resultant mental/emotional "miscarriage" (i.e., nervous breakdown). While Carrington had turned to writing as a medium before 1945, Varo was not able to do so until 1954, when her marriage to Walter Gruen presented a previously unknown financial security which enabled her to give up the commercial art work that had consumed her energy and talents. During this period Carrington -- who painted for herself and never believed anyone would exhibit or purchase her work (Chadwick, 194) -- wrote plays, novels, short stories (and even continued mirror writing within her watercolors), while Varo recorded accounts of her

dreams, invented games and magic formulas and -- according to an interview with Carrington -- collaborated with her on a Surrealist play. Such were the products of a friendship which included the sharing of dreams, stories, and magic potions.

Apparently, they incorporated each other's culture and background into their works (consider, for example, Carrington's 1951 Carved Decorated Woman with its clearly Mexican motif, and Varo's Ascension to Mt. Analogue (1960) in which -- though the title was taken from Rene Daumal's unfinished novel -- inheres Celtic mysticism and their shared vision of the journey toward spiritual purification). They had an immediate affinity with each other in terms of exploring woman as the seeker of spiritual enlightenment. As Chadwick has surmised, the two claimed a vision of "painting as a recording of life's many voyages: physical, metaphysical, and spiritual" (195). They transform reality in their paintings as they pursue symbolic quests for enlightenment, travels which -- though beset with despair and obstacles -- burst with creative life (see, for example, Varo's Exploration of the Sources of the Orinoco River, (1959).[4] Here, as in Las Almas de Los Montes (1938) painted two decades earlier, the wise woman creator is a spiritual force. In the former -- understandably the most widely included in discussions of her work -- the woman is scientist and explorer, equipped with a wing-tipped (hydraulic?), egg-shaped vessel which enables her to glide toward the source she seeks. In the latter, she is the mystic seeker of spiritual altitudes, collaborating in the search with other women of like mind, temperament, and spirit to transcend the mountains which encase/enfold them. And portrayed most graphically in The Creation of Birds (1958), her owl-like wisdom creates and generates life as well as art, without the need of the muse. As an alchemist, she is capable of transforming light into creatures of flight and freedom, or into the colors which constitute her palette. The violin about her neck is quite literally instrumental in the creation of the birds and, perhaps, the music they will make, thus giving her enterprise an inter-artistic tone.

She is as such self-sufficient to the needs of creation and, significantly, of re-creation. She herself is Born Again (1960), as she discovers the light of the crescent moon in a chalice much like the one found in Exploration of the Sources of the Orinico River. This recurrent image, as Chadwick has noted (215, 218), suggests the search for the Holy Grail as the metaphysical source of rebirth or resurrection. In Born Again, this chalice links woman and woman's reflection with the lunar and thus reproductive powers of nature. So, too, are the fruits of nature reborn in the mystical vortex entitled Resurrected Still Life (1963), wherein spherically-shaped pieces of fruit are bursting with the juices of life. This theme of multi-dimensional resurrection, as well as her microscopic scrutiny of natural forms, present themselves again in The Flutist (1955), where the notes of the flute ascend, though in circular and cyclic fashion rather than linear (i.e., via the staircase) progression. Nature and its past (as etched in the fossils) underlie and reinforce acts of artistic creation.

In two other works done in the same two-year period, Varo brings light and vibration/sound together as the sources of all creation. The beautiful Solar Music (1955) is regenerative of life and art both: here light and sound make the earth fertile and ensure the birds' freedom from their cocoons. Harmony (1956) is literally "composed" of magical correspondences between the spiritual and material, which enable order and (re)creation. But this harmony is not achieved without struggle. Like the women in the walls whose spirits are integral to the triumph of harmony, the objects in the room refuse to be contained: drawers, chests, chairs, tiles burst with life (for example, the bird's nest) and movement, creating what might seem to be chaos. But the horn-shaped staffs, balanced by natural elements which create, echo, and convey sound (i.e., leaves and sea shells), restore a healthy, productive, liberating balance. Again, reiminscent of Born Again, we see the motif of serene yet vibrant women emerging from the walls and thus breaking through and transcending material barriers.

These were among the works shown at Varo's first one-woman exhibition, which took place in 1956 in Mexico City, seven years before her untimely death. Even a glance at her works in Janet Kaplan's superb new biography, Unexpected Journeys, The Art and Life of Remedios Varo, would leave no surprise as to why her 1971 retrospective drew the largest audiences in Mexican history to the Museo de Arte Moderno.[5]

Quite clearly, the Surrealist Movement

provided women artists an environment for multiple expressions of their inner realities. It did not, contrary to the wishes and rationalizations of the male surrealists, furnish them with a set of artistic/theoretical ideals. For the women created their own. They were not defined by their affiliation with Surrealism; rather, their self-identity was linked to their lives as artists. This is true on a visual and a literary level. Surrealists have often been accused of being overly "literary," i.e., more concerned with the illustrative and the ideational rather than the pictorial and sensate, as Chadwick so accurately describes (219). For the women artists, this literary expression shaped (or at times was shaped by) their pictorial conceptions. Or else it became the true "metier" through which evolved their surrealistic vision and voice. Hence were the painters also writers in various genres: Carrington, novels; Carrington and Fini, plays, short stories, poems, and texts; Carrington and Varo, symbolic quests which become narrative-journeys; and Varo and Kahlo, diaries. In each, I think, the literary image fostered and gave form to visual expression, the inter-artistic analysis and study of which itself merits considerable careful thought and analytical study. These women artists viewed themselves as functioning independently of the Breton circle and of Surrealist doctrine, and were often much younger than their male colleagues. As Chadwick posits, "Their involvement was defined by personal relationships, networks of friends and lovers, not by active participation in an inner circle dominated by Breton's presence (11). If indeed, as Matthews claims, the first Surrealist Manifesto was NOT a program for revolutionizing art and literature, but instead an appeal for a revision of human values (Toward a Poetics of Surrealism, 71) then we all have a great deal to learn from the women artists' successful efforts toward this end. Their lack of interest in a male-sanctioned surrealist "theory" enabled them to escape the "inevitable" void that is illusionism. Unlike the art of men in the movement, women's art does not have an "OTHER"-focused repository for the projection of erotic desire, nor does it embrace Freud and Sade,as male Surrealist art does. Women's Surrealist art remarkably and repeatedly illustrates that eroticism is internalized, much as the muse for women is internalized and, reciprocally, originates from inner rather than outer/other sources. Further, it employs little externalized, and no --to my knowledge -- gratuitous violence, nor public art of disruption. Such matters are private and personal, and treated with dignity.

Varo and, in large part, Kahlo created an art of sensibility and harmony, rather than an hallucinatory disjunction -- even when, particularly for Kahlo, various types of disjunction informed much of her existence. That harmony is found not only in their artistic, spiritual, and personal bonding with each other and their work, but also with their self-defined, woman-identified bonding with nature. The self-taught, self-referential nature of women's surreal art allowed for the dominance of personal reality, and found its "structure" (or, I should say, took its shape) in a visual and narrative flow, rather than a dislocated abruptness. The personal and artistic honesty and heroism of these women artists have made of them models for all women artists struggling to contain their own "broken columns" and their own evolving transfigurations.

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NOTES

1. See Bryson's brilliant analysis of the male "look" (in French, "regard", which is a collapsed version of "reprendre sous gard" -- to keep under watch--) which hardens into a gaze that, overwrought with anxiety, wants to at once consummate and consume the object of fear or other-ness (1983, 93), in this case, woman.

2. Smith has intriguingly suggested that this painting is an ironic version of Diego Rivera's nature paintings. See his article, "From the Margins: Modernity and the Case of Frida Kahlo," Block, no. 8, (1983), 14.

3. As yet another surrealist artist Leonor Fini, with whom she developed a close, supportive friendship, Carrington was a rebellious Catholic struggling for independence and was expelled from school for doing so. This mutual respect and understanding manifests itself in Fini's The Alcove: An Interior with Three Women (1939), a tribute to Carrington who -- in the stance and apparel of a warrior -- is defended, powerful, autonomous. . . in a word, triumphant in the face of defeat.

Arising from their similar backgrounds and community of struggle and pain -- both Fini and Carrington (and later Remedios Varo) developed similar ideas. A prime motif, for example, was the alchemical identification of the egg with woman's creative and restorative powers (and corresponding empowerment of one another). As the vessel of transformation, it becomes the source of all life and, therefore, of all art. It was thus that this recurrent image became the quintessential element among women surrealists in the search for a pictorial language which communicated their psychic evolutionary process.

4. Chadwick claims that this work is a pictorial version of Varo's 1947 trip to Venezuela to visit her brother, when she travelled to the country's source, the Orinoco

River, in search of gold.

5. A comparative analysis of Carrington's later works with Varo's earlier ones will demonstrate how Carrington continued and recombined images employed by Varo to confound conventional readings and elicit new ones. While Varo's search at the end of her life seemed to be to dispel despair and depression, Carrington laid claim to woman's legendary powers:

> *Most of us, I hope, are now aware that a woman should not have to demand Rights. The Rights were there from the beginning; they must be Taken Back Again, including the mysteries which were ours and which were violated, stolen or destroyed, leaving us with thankless hope of pleasing a male animal, probably of one's own species* (Leonora Carrington: A Reptrospective Exhibition, Exhibition Catalogue) (New York: Center for Inter-American Relations, 1976; cited in Chadwick).

Evidently, Carrington held true to such claims, by re-claiming the rights and mysteries -- heretofore often violated or destroyed particularly by male artists -- through her own works.