Leonora Carrington and the Mexican Neo-Avantgarde in the 1960s

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In considering the traditional historiography of modern Western art, the Second World War provided the material and historical conditions necessary for the advent of a globalized artistic scene. It inaugurated the displacement of the center of artistic production from Paris to new horizons across the Atlantic: to New York, obviously, but also Mexico City, Buenos Aires and São Paulo. In this globalized context, new avant-garde or neo-avant-garde expressions emerged, often were radicalized, and took up proposals of the historical avant-garde, whether in conceptual or plastic form, in order to adapt them to the challenges of the time.

In response to these new paradigms, art critics and theorists, such as Peter Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, adopted what could be called an "imitative" interpretation of these new avant-gardes. Bürger stated that the new avant-gardes were merely derivative and inauthentic iterations of the artistic experiments of earlier in the century. Bürger establishes a hierarchy between the historical European avant-gardes and peripheral neo-avant-gardes, opposing centers of art production to places that produced mere imitation. In his view, "the Neo-avant-garde, which stages for a second time the avant-gardist break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatever."[1] He laments the fact that as soon as avant-gardes are mimicked, appropriated and reinterpreted by new movements, they become historicized.[2]

As a matter of fact, the tension between centers and peripheries arose when a number of avant-garde artists and intellectuals were forced to flee Europe, and found shelter on the American continent. While the European scenes were pervaded with the feeling that every possible artistic pathway had been exhausted, America began to appear as the place for an efficient renewal and reformulation of European failures. In the words of André Breton, Mexico thus became "the surrealist location *par excellence*."[3] Indeed, under Lázaro Cárdenas' presidency (1934-1940), Mexico

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offered asylum to scores of European exiles fleeing fascism. It was in this context that many surrealist artists settled there, among them, Wolfgang Paalen, Alice Rahon and Eva Sulzer, Kati and José Horna, Remedios Varo, Benjamin Péret and Leonora Carrington.

When the surrealist exiles arrived in Mexico, they had to navigate an extremely polarized political context. After the end of the Mexican revolution, the struggle for *Mexicanidad* continued in the cultural and artistic realm, and found its main expression in the so-called Mexican School of Painting. This movement was dominated by the *Tres Grandes*, namely Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, and it benefited from policies that aimed at supporting the arts. Its iconography relied heavily on notions of heroism, patriotism and national cohesion, allowing little space for individual expression. As a consequence of this exacerbated nationalism, both the European exiles who came from abroad and the newer generation of artists who were regarded as foreigners were left out of major cultural events and from the main national museums such as the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) and the Museo Nacional de Artes Plásticas, founded during Miguel Alemán's presidency (1946-1952), in 1946 and 1947 respectively.

In 1940, the "International Exhibition of Surrealism," co-organized by Wolfgang Paalen and César Moro and inaugurated at the Galería de Arte Mexicano, tried to bring the surrealist formula defined by André Breton in his various *Manifestes du Surréalisme* to the Latin American continent. Even though the exhibition was widely covered in the national press and dubbed a major cultural event, it was also described as an "act of snobbery," the reflection of a "distorted" European mentality.[4] As the surrealist vision rejected any form of nationalism, it struggled to find its ground in Mexican society, which was trying to define its own cultural identity. The misunderstanding of the Mexican public as well as local critics led some members of the movement to speak of a failed encounter of Surrealism with Mexico. And indeed, Péret returned to France after the war ended in 1947, César Moro went back to Peru a year later, and Paalen committed suicide in 1959. The community of exiles struggled to find a place in their country of adoption.

In the late 1950s however Surrealism finally found an audience in a new generation of artists, commonly known as the *Ruptura*, which was looking for a new kind of art, and proved to be receptive to the influence of the international avant-garde.[5] Given the necessity to create alternative places for exhibition, new galleries began to proliferate in the *Zona Rosa* (Pink Zone), a neighborhood of Mexico City nested between the historical center and the Chapultepec Forest. In the new galleries of Antonio Souza, Juan Martín, or the Pecanins sisters,[6] both European surrealists and the new generations of Mexican artists had their artwork displayed, often in group shows, thus underlining an interest in international projection and visibility in systems beyond the local level. More than the shared pursuit of common artistic interests, this transnational and transhistorical reunion also reflected the exhaustion

of nationalist rhetoric and the need for an aesthetic renewal aimed at exploring subjectivity. This convergence did not lead to a formally defined movement, but it led to an unprecedented diversification of discourse and artistic manifestations. From Surrealism to Abstraction, Informalism and Geometrism, the artists were all exhibited together in a seemingly haphazard way, manifesting the vitality of these new forms of expression.

What does the very notion of Surrealism mean in this renewed cultural landscape? Was there a real dialogue between "historical" Surrealism and the new generation of artists, and if so, what were its concrete manifestations? Despite the widely accepted idea that exiles were secluded from the Mexican artistic world, many interactions and even collaborations actually took place between the local art scene and the Surrealists, especially the surrealist women. Unlike their male counterparts, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Kati Horna and Alice Rahon all decided to settle permanently in Mexico, where they spent most of their artistic careers. And from the 1960s onwards, they regularly exhibited their work in the new Mexican galleries.

The photographer Kati Horna thus participated in the sulfurous exhibition "Los Hartos" inaugurated in 1961 at the Antonio Souza Gallery, which was led by one of the main representatives of plastic and architectural modernism, the German-born Mexican artist Mathias Goeritz. The semi-abstract paintings created in Mexico by the poet and painter Alice Rahon foreshadowed the incursion of a new Mexican generation that favored abstraction or new figurative forms of poetry. In terms of the richness and consistency of the dialogue initiated with Mexican artists, the experience of the English artist Leonora Carrington remains an exception. Since the end of the 1950s, she played a predominant role within the alternative cultural scene. She collaborated with several leading members of the national and international avant-garde, including the Chilean filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky and the Mexican writer Salvador Elizondo. The result of these unprecedented collaborations lead us to question the nature of this dialogue, as well as the adaptability of Surrealism to a different geographical, social and political context. What motivated this intergenerational encounter? How did both scenes enrich each other? Was Surrealism still able to provide a formal framework for the aspirations of a younger generation of artists?

In analyzing Leonora Carrington's collaborations with Mexican artists, this article will engage with notions of foreignness, mobility, and gender as productive categories of analysis in order to break away from Eurocentric interpretations of the Latin American avant-garde as a continuation, filiation or inheritor of the European scene. In the words of Stephanie d'Alessandro and Matthew Gale in the recent exhibition "Surrealism Beyond Borders," it is necessary to

> […] challenge the hierarchies of cultural dominance that were—despite the radicalism of Surrealism—among its determining conditions, often related to race, class, gender, access and privilege. Rather than a progression of heredity and influence, the conceptual model of a history of rhizomatic connectivity—with an emphasis on adjacency and exchange, as opposed to hierarchical structure—offers an opportunity to restore balance in the power relationships. New narratives from a more open set of coordinates, and from multiple sites and events, draw together threads that are synchronic, overlapping, and mutually enriching.[7]

By suspending the traditional evolutionary model of art, we make visible the historical simultaneity, exchanges, absorptions and translations between the different avant-gardes and set the conditions for new interpretations of Surrealism in the 1960s.

The Theatrical Avant-garde: Alejandro Jodorowsky, Penelope and the "Magician"

In *El Maestro y las magas*,[8] Alejandro Jodorowsky devotes an entire chapter to his friendship with Leonora Carrington, whom he met when he arrived in Mexico in the late 1950s. In an initiation story fraught with mysticism and alchemical symbols, he portrays the artist as one of the *magas* responsible for his spiritual formation. This highly subjective text can hardly be considered reliable testimony when it comes to the establishing of accurate facts. However it sheds new light on Jodorowsky's perception of the English painter. Although their relationship is presented as one between a teacher and her student, Carrington is also described as an idealized woman who stirs an ancestral fear of an incestuous relationship with the mother. From the very first pages, Jodorowsky insists on the age gap between himself and Carrington, a difference which also drives his desire: "I had just turned 30. According to Breton, she was born in 1917. In other words, I was going to meet a 52-year-old woman. I was afraid I'd be welcomed by an old shrew with a tarantula-shaped shadow. To me, at that time, old age was synonymous with ugliness."[9]

Nevertheless this first encounter began an artistic friendship that soon materialized in concrete productions. What caused the creative affinity between Jodorowsky and the "female master that [he] had been seeking for years?"[10] Cuauhtémoc Medina's analysis of the turmoil that agitated Mexican society in the 1960s may help to shed light on this convergence. He insists on the fact that the cultural scene at the time suffered from a form of sclerosis, to which artists reacted by transgressing norms. Sexual dissidence, curiosity about psychotropic drugs, skepticism towards modernization and a questioning of bourgeois identity were among the obsessions that violently permeated contemporary art. This atmosphere of spiritual experimentation—characteristic of a New Age tendency—gave

birth, on the local scene, to what Medina considers "a sort of new baroque: [...] a profusion of symbolic formulas that are decidedly anti-rational, addicted to sensory overload, inclined to present apocalyptic visions of modernity and capitalism."[11] Jodorowsky appears to be the incarnation of this new baroque aesthetic, which helps us understand why he identified with Carrington's complex and hermetic universe, inspired by alchemical esotericism, psychoanalysis, Zen Buddhism, Gurdjieff's mysticism and other Eastern religious traditions. Jodorowsky was fascinated not by the surrealist artist but by the "New Age" goddess he saw in her. Having met André Breton in the mid-1950s, the Chilean director was familiar with Surrealism. However he quickly distanced himself from the movement in order to establish an avant-garde of his own, the Panic movement, alongside Fernando Arrabal and Roland Topor.[12]

Jodorowsky and Carrington's friendship expressed itself best through the medium of theater.[13] In 1958 they wrote a "disgusting surrealist operetta for mutant children" entitled *La princesa Araña* (The Spider Princess).[14] Provocatively addressed to children, the four-act play, revolves around a young Blue-Cuckoo Prince's quest to find his spider-sister. It uses this story as a pretext to touch upon themes of incest, devouring, abjection and absurdity. The work was never intended to be read or performed, and it remained secret for 48 years. It seems to have been more of a game between the two artists, in true surrealist fashion.

In this respect, *La princesa Araña* differs from Jodorowsky's 1961 production of Carrington's play *Penelope*. This later text is a reflection on the world of childhood, or more precisely, a struggle against the ghosts of childhood. The plot is set in the mindscape of the protagonist, Penelope, who falls prey to her impulses and instincts. Inspired by Freudian theories, the play presents a number of archetypal characters and situations: a rivalry with the mother, attraction/repulsion for the authoritarian father, and lust felt towards Tartarus, a rocking-horse that embodies virile passion. In the end, Tartarus dies at the father's hands, allowing for Penelope's emancipation; free from the bonds that tied her to childhood, she symbolically escapes through a window.[15]

What drew the stage director towards this text written some twenty years earlier, in 1946? Jodorowsky was, first of all, interested in Freud's theories. The complex symbolism of a work in which each word conceals a latent meaning must therefore have sparked his interest. To this we can add the scenic possibilities offered by *Penelope* as a theatrical expression of the way dreams and the unconscious work. For Jodorowsky, as for the Surrealists, theater needs to move beyond the narrow boundaries of literature and explore the visual and sensory possibilities offered by stage design, costumes (which Carrington created herself), the actors's play, the sonic environment and lighting as many means to reach the audience's subconscious. From this perspective, *Penelope*, as a play ripe with ghosts and hallucinatory visions, provided the director with an open playground where he could experiment.

Unfortunately few visual traces of this collaboration remain, apart from

some preparatory sketches by Carrington and photographs taken by Kati Horna during the rehearsals. A comparative study of these documents reveals Carrington and Jodorowsky's shared interest in the Tarot game. The scenography, in particular, makes this obvious, as it features representations of the Hanged Man, the Ace of Wands and the Ace of Cups, among others. In her chapter devoted to Alejandro Jodorowsky in *Surrealism and Film after 1945: Absolutely Modern Mysteries*, Abigail Susik stresses the fact that it was Carrington who initiated him to the occult sciences, and to the Marseilles Tarot in particular.[16] Kati Horna's photographs also give us a glimpse of the costumes designed by Carrington. The masks play a central role in bringing to life half-human, half-animal characters who experience dislocation and dismemberment. Jodorowsky's adaptation of *Penelope* stands at the crossroads of Carrington's monstrous take on corporeity and Panic's bodily experimentations. The physical body is placed at the heart of a ritual that takes place on stage. As Jodorowsky puts it, "Almost all the gestures we have used are magical signs, whether Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan or medieval. We have studied ancient representations to identify gestures we could use to conjure up gods and demons."[17]

In the absence of visual archives of the performance, reviews of the play published in the Mexican press at the time offer us precious insight as to how *Penelope* was received. The play premiered on September 1, 1961 at the Teatro de la Esfera and was a huge success. In the cultural supplement of the national newspaper *Excélsior*, playwright and poet Marcela del Río described it as "the most complete surrealist achievement" that Mexico had ever seen. In *Novedades*, researcher and theater critic Armando de María y Campos referred to it as "authentic surrealist theater."[18]

Such an enthusiastic reception points towards a clear shift in the Mexican public's taste, which started to value the surrealist aesthetic. However, Armando de María y Campos also insisted on how innovative the play was compared to other national productions at the time. He stressed that "the surrealist theater genre is rarely brought to the commercial stage" and recognized the "commendable audacity [it takes to] stage plays of this kind."[19] The Mexican Theater Critics Association even awarded a prize to Carrington for her stage design in January 1962.[20] It must be noted that the public was already familiar with the Carrington's artistic universe , as the Instituto de Bellas Artes had organized a retrospective exhibition of her work at the Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno a year earlier.

However, they weren't as familiar with Jodorowsky's theatrical experiments. This success stands out in the director's Mexican experience, which was largely marked by prohibition and censorship.[21] Indeed, in the 1960s the Mexican public was largely unaware of new theatrical experiments. It was through Jodorowsky that they discovered Beckett and Ionesco's repertoire, and the concept of the "theater of cruelty" coined by Antonin Artaud. Surrounded by a circle of students and artists of the *Ruptura*, the director sought to move beyond traditionally accepted conventions

of dramatic expression. One of Jodorowsky's great ambitions was to confront the audience's passivity by placing them in situations of crisis, induced by euphoria or violence, in ways that were reminiscent of the experiments carried by The Living Theatre in New York or by Herman Nitsch's Viennese Actionism.

Based on what the critics said about it, *Penelope* seems not nearly as radical as some of Jodorowsky's other productions, such as *Ghost Sonata* (1961) or *The Opera of Order* (1962). This suggests that collaborating with another artist—who also happened to be ten years older than he—may have lessened the director's transgressive frenzy. It appears that the surrealist painter had a pivotal influence on stage design and the performance's overall aesthetic. In a 1976 interview with theater director Joanne Pottlitzer, Carrington acknowledged that she had initially misunderstood Jodorowsky's take on her play. She also stressed the inherent challenges of collaborative work: "[...] looking back, I think he did a better job than I thought at the time. He put a lot of his personality into it, and that disturbed me a little bit at the time, because I hadn't visualized it being staged that way. But in retrospect, I think it was fine."[22] Despite this, the initial misunderstandings caused the two artists to distance themselves from each other, and they would not work together again until 1968.[23]

Did surrealist subversion turn out to be obsolete when confronted with the desire of a new generation of artists to break away from the dictates of modern society? For Jodorowsky, as for Carrington, radicality lies above all in the transformative power of the theatrical work that possesses the potential to cause profound inner change and expand the consciousness of both actor and spectator. Be it through Surrealists' poetic evocations or Panic's cathartic violence, metamorphosis is at the core of the conception of artistic and theatrical practice they share—which is, in Jodorowsky's own words, "a kind of alchemical theater."[24]

The Literary and Plastic Avant-garde: Lady Carrington as S.NOB *Artist*

The next year, from June to October 1962, Carrington experienced the *S.NOB* attitude. Among the many avant-garde art and literature journals circulating in the early 1960s, *S.NOB* is exceptional, both because of how short-lived it was—there were only seven issues—and for its iconoclastic ambitions that differed from the Mexican art world, which was generally marked by standardization and cultural nationalism. *S.NOB* was created by Mexican writers Salvador Elizondo, Juan García Ponce and screenwriter Emilio García Riera, and its main objective was to establish a dialogue between literary, artistic and visual experiments carried out in Mexico and those of the international avant-garde movements. The journal was conceived as a non-official platform for transdisciplinary debates; it adopted an experimental format that was better suited to the introduction of new theories and ways of thinking. The publication oscillates between humor and immoralism, and deals with themes as diverse as incest, coprophagia, lycanthropy, necrophilia, suicide, drugs, neurosis

and other perversions. In it these unconventional topics are examined alongside reflections on jazz music, French and North American literature, modern painting and cinema.

The journal's name is derived from the Latin phrase *sine nobilitat*, which refers to people who, despite being commoners, behave as if they were noble. By breaking down national boundaries and mobilizing a global cultural heritage, and therefore standing against the nationalistic concerns that prevailed at the time, the journal's contributors claimed a snobbish attitude not only towards Mexican society but also towards the alleged "universal culture" that they assimilated and actualized in order to better question the Eurocentrism of interactions between the historical and new Latin American avant-gardes. Presenting themselves as *snobs*, they denied the legacies of the past while at the same time claiming a position of intellectual authority.

This paradoxical and ironic position was reflected in the choice of contributors: the *S.NOB* circle was formed by artists from the new generation who were sympathetic to dissident forms of expression,[25] along with older collaborators from the first generation of Surrealists, including Carrington herself, but also José and Kati Horna. *S.NOB* was a space for dialogue, exchange, and transnational and intergenerational collaboration that occupied a unique place in the cultural landscape of 1960s Mexico. It originated new forms of sociability. According to Florence Olivier, *S.NOB* was "an exhilarating magazine, created by a tightly knit group that had in common a whole dietetics [...] of the use of arts and pleasures, which they tried to impose against the attitudes that prevailed in Mexico until then."[26]

Florence Olivier borrows the concept of dietetics from Michel Foucault, who defined it as a form of self-care supported by balanced and healthy bodily practices, including pleasure and sexuality. The French philosopher conceives of dietetics as a means towards a cultural and political ideal. These practices must serve to prepare citizens for political life through the creation of a normative and disciplinary environment.[27] However, in the works published in *S.NOB,* dietetics are subjected to a radical inversion, giving way to an aesthetic of insubordination and to a systematic profanation of corporality. The body becomes the locus of all artistic experimentation: a place of desire and laughter but also of horror, as evidenced by Salvador Elizondo's reflection on the Chinese torture *leng tch'é*, initially evoked by George Bataille in *The Tears of Eros.*[28] In exploring corporeal violence, grotesque monstrosity and sexual ambiguity, *S.NOB* inscribes itself in a materialist surrealist filiation, through the prism of Elizondo's reading of Bataille, and, distances itself from idealist Bretonian concepts.[29]

In her essay "Fantasías eróticas, sueños ocultos y afanes libertinos. Cuerpo y transgresión en la revista *S.nob* (1962)," [30] Elva Peniche Montfort underscores a substantial change in the way the new generation approaches transgression and corporality, in contrast to their surrealist predecessors—the younger generation being more radical in their desire to use laughter and violence to cross the boundaries of

what is socially acceptable. She gives the example of three series of photographs (or "visual tales"[31]) by Kati Horna, in which she uses the photographic image as a dreamlike projection. These were published in a section of the journal titled "Fetish," and indeed, the photographer provides a reflection on the Freudian concept of fetishism in relation to the female body, thus remaining close to an orthodox conception of Surrealism. In the series "Ode to necrophilia" the model, who appears to be none other than Leonora Carrington, poses in an intimate space covered by a black veil that reveals parts of her naked body (Fig. 1). Her face is hidden, symbolically echoing the white death mask lying on the bed. The poetics of these images rely on a range of conceptual and formal contrasts—between darkness and light, presence and absence, eroticism and death, pleasure and suffering. The subversive title presents the viewer with a renewed vision of the female body that is considered as a subject and not as an object; here, on the contrary, it is the object's presence that sublimates the power of the *érotique voilée*.

However Carrington's numerous contributions to *S.NOB* showcase a close interconnection between the publication's immorality and her own aesthetics, characterized by caustic use of off-beat humor, the debunking of conventional moral values and the mastering of the art of *détournement*. The five illustrated stories published in the "Children's Corner" section subvert children's genres such as fables, fairy tales and nursery rhymes, introducing the themes of scatophilia ("The Nasty Story of the Chamomile Tea"), monstrosity and deformity ("The Monster of Chihuahua") or dismemberment and the corporal grotesque ("The horrible Story of the *Carnitas* (Little Meats)" and "Headless John"). These stories seem to be devoid of any form of morality; however, they never present violence towards children in a purely sadistic or masochistic way. In "Headless John" for example, the displacement of the head as the site of *logos* can be perceived as liberating. Therefore, if there is a moral, it cannot be understood with our rational reading grids; it only unfolds within the story's own universe.

Paradoxically, and seemingly against the publication's firm anti-nationalist stance, Carrington's contributions are firmly rooted in their geographical context: they are inscribed in a specifically Mexican cultural context, and they mobilize collective national imagery. This is particularly tangible in the choice of titles ("The Monster of Chihuahua," "The Horrible Story of the *Carnitas* (Little Meats)"). The most compelling example of this spatial and cultural anchoring is the story "De cómo funde una industria o el sarcófago de hule" ("How to Start a Pharmaceutical Business, Or The Rubber Sarcophagus") published in *S.NOB*'s third issue, which proposes a reinvention of Mexican history, but viewed through a transnational prism. Carrington situates her narrative in a post-apocalyptic Mexico built on the ruins of the contemporary period and ruled by "King Chapultepec von Smith II (son of Atzapotzalco Guggenheim)."[32] Inspired by Mexican neighborhoods, the monarch's name appears as a grotesque collage and seems to abolish traditional hierarchies

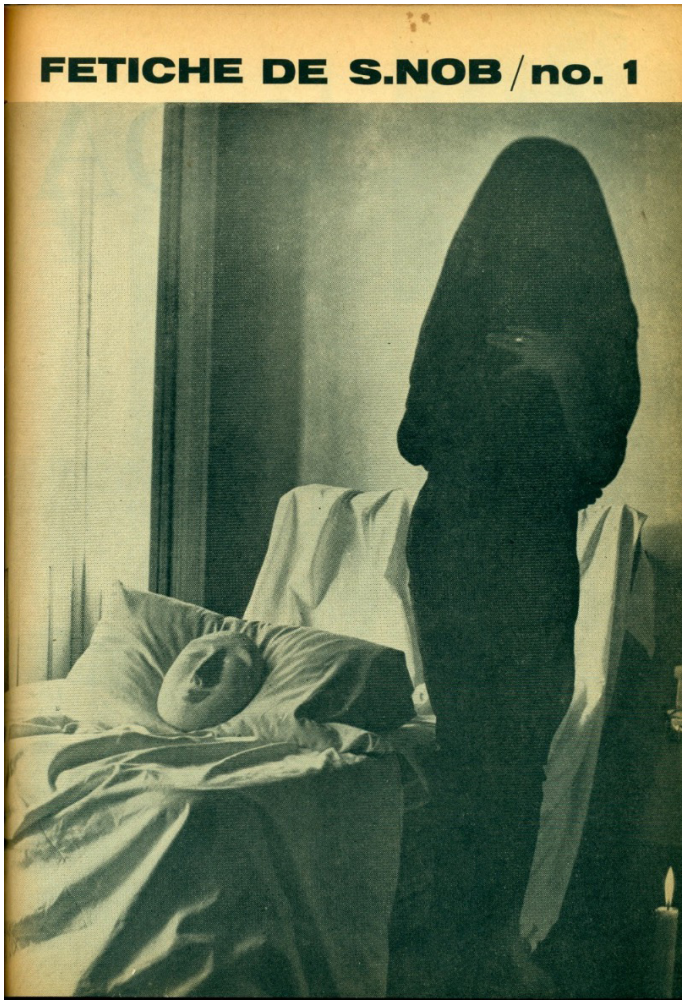

Fig. 1. Kati Horna, "Fetiche 1. Oda a la Necrofilia," photograph reproduced in *S.NOB* #2 (June 27, 1962): 21, Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Mexico City, Mexico

between European and Mexican referents. Carrington thus operates a spatio-temporal defamiliarization and describes a globalized universe in which "enchiladas" are a traditional Norwegian dish produced in Japan, and Coca Cola, an extremely rare pre-Columbian drink.

In this setting, the first-person narrator organizes an urban picnic with two high-ranking dignitaries of Mexican society, "Lord Popocatepetl" and "Viscount Distrito Federal," named respectively after a volcano located near Mexico City and the Mexican capital itself. During the picnic, the protagonist receives a prize she has won at the national lottery: a miniature sarcophagus made of rubber, inside which she finds a toothbrush-sized mummy of Joseph Stalin. An inscription mentions that the mummy belonged successively to Queen Elizabeth II, Dwight Eisenhower

and the National Museum of Mexico, before being canonized by the Vatican in 1958. Beyond proposing a post-apocalyptic projection of Mexico, Carrington also reinterprets a fictionalized diegetic past that corresponds to the author's present: by rewriting the history of Mexico she provides a more global reflection on the contemporary context of the Cold War. The narrator resorts to the expertise of an obscure scholar to decipher the acronyms of the two main powers of the conflict, thus formulating an ironic comment on the author's geopolitical context: "U.S.A." comes to mean "United Self-Annihilation" while "U.S.S.R." stands for "United Solo Sepulchre Regression."[33]

At the end of the story, the Soviet leader and General Secretary of the Communist Party is used for his unexpected medicinal virtues. Indeed, the protagonist finally uses the dictator's mummy to start her own pharmaceutical company, which sells an aspirin derivative called "Apostalin." In a subtle play on words, Carrington turns Stalin into an "apostate"—the apostate being the one who publicly renounces a doctrine, belief or religion—since after passing through the hands of the greatest Western leaders, Joseph Stalin finally serves the capitalist market, as commercialized as aspirin. This ending also enables the artist to restore a sort of historical justice, since the dictator who killed millions now contributes to cure "whooping cough, syphilis, grippe, childbearing, and other convulsions" and provides the protagonist with "an agreeable and distinguished life."[34] According to Jonathan P. Eburne, the satire of Stalin and Western modernity is coupled with a reflection on the Mexican culture of death and a revaluation of the circular logic prevalent in pre-Columbian cosmology: "the posthumous fate of such a figure is no less a reintegration: a reabsorption of his historical violence into an ethical and historical economy regulated according to the practice of death."[35]

Through her use of dark humor and her rethinking of Mexican and global history, Leonora Carrington's creations perfectly echo the preoccupations of her time as well as the will to break with hegemonic narratives that she shared with the younger generation. As the magazine's creators did not claim any affiliation with the surrealist aesthetic, apart from the participation of some historical members of the movement, Carrington appears to be the main point of connection between the *S.NOB* circle and Surrealism. It is therefore not surprising to see her featured in the "Iconographia Snobarium," a pastiche gallery of the various contributors to the journal, published in the third issue of July 1962 (Fig. 2).[36]

In this portrait, the artist's head is replaced by that of a man, while the caption ironically insists on her class privilege, mocking her aristocratic social ascendance and presenting her as a "rich heiress" proudly displaying her "family jewels." Being the ultimate icon of snobbery, Carrington is therefore introduced as a mentoring figure, albeit in a humorous way. In her essay focusing on Carrington's contributions to *S.NOB*, Abigail Susik also demonstrates how the sexual innuendo that is present in the phrase "family jewels" turns the artist into a castrating father

Fig. 2. Anonymous, Untitled and Undated montage reproduced in "Iconographia Snobarium," *S.NOB* #3 (July 4, 1962): 20, Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Mexico City, Mexico

figure, who served as both role model and collaborator among an almost exclusively male group of intellectuals. According to her, "Carrington's queered portrait portrays her 'snobbish' task of modelling the avant-garde legacy for the next generation while simultaneously debunking such a task as patriarchal, or establishment-bound, by linking it to wealth, genetic pedigree and feminised phallicism."[37]

Unfortunately, this weekly journal full of humor, irony, parodic and scandalous interventions was discontinued for economic reasons after only seven issues, and its reception was restricted to a closed circle of "S.nobs." If art critic Ida Rodríguez Prampolini depicted *S.NOB* as the last burst of a waning surrealist movement,[38] the journal appears more as a reactive and reproductive proposal of

the historical avant-garde, using parody, transgression, playfulness and a touch of dark humor to question the obsessions of the time and to showcase renewed artistic reflection on Mexican identity.

The Political Avant-garde: "Women's Awareness"

It would hardly be possible to study the complex cultural context of the 1960s without mentioning the year 1968, marked as it was by socio-political upheavals and student revolts on a global scale. These tensions were also felt in Mexico, where they revealed the internal contradictions of an authoritarian regime—that of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)—willing to have a say in the concert of nations. But 1968 was also the year of the XIXth Olympics, which took place in the Mexican capital in October. The event came with massive expectations: the objective was to showcase Mexico's political and cultural modernity to the world, proving that the nation had nothing to envy to its Western counterparts. The situation was therefore already tense when the popular movement was ignited in the heart of the Ciudad Universitaria in July 1968. This movement was met with systematic repression from the state. The most striking example was the Tlatelolco massacre, perpetrated by the army a few days before the inaugural ceremony of the Olympics. If this blood bath did not cause much emotion among world leaders, the revolutionary impulses of Mexican youth were stopped in their tracks.

Carrington was linked to the student movement through her two sons Gabriel and Pablo, who were active in the militant circles of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Dated August 13th, 1968, *Lepidóptera* is a testimony of her indignation against the authoritarian policies of the Mexican government and its persecution of activists (Fig. 3).[39] Rooted in its historical context, the painting is unique within the artist's production; it uses several mediums to convey a strong political message. A hybrid figure stands at the center of the composition, half-woman and half-butterfly, with her hands raised as a sign of vulnerability—or of rebellion. Before her stands a second figure, mounted on a fantastic creature, whose gaping mouth looks like a drop of blood. The dynamic brushstrokes, violently applied, attest of the artist's eagerness to execute the work in the face of the urgent political situation.

This sense of urgency is further amplified by the unusual use of text, included directly on the canvas. Carrington clarifies her intention and frames the painting with a double message written in black letters. On the right, she quotes a fragment of the poem "The Damp" by the English metaphysical poet John Donne (1572-1631). Although cryptic, this excerpt is tainted by warlike vocabulary which incites to conquest and bravery. On the left, we can read the following inscription in Spanish: "This is the Lepidoptera. This is not the portrait of some politician. No. Neither is she in the police or in the army. She is not hurting or murdering anyone, this is a free painting and I want to stay free." Through anaphoric repetition of the

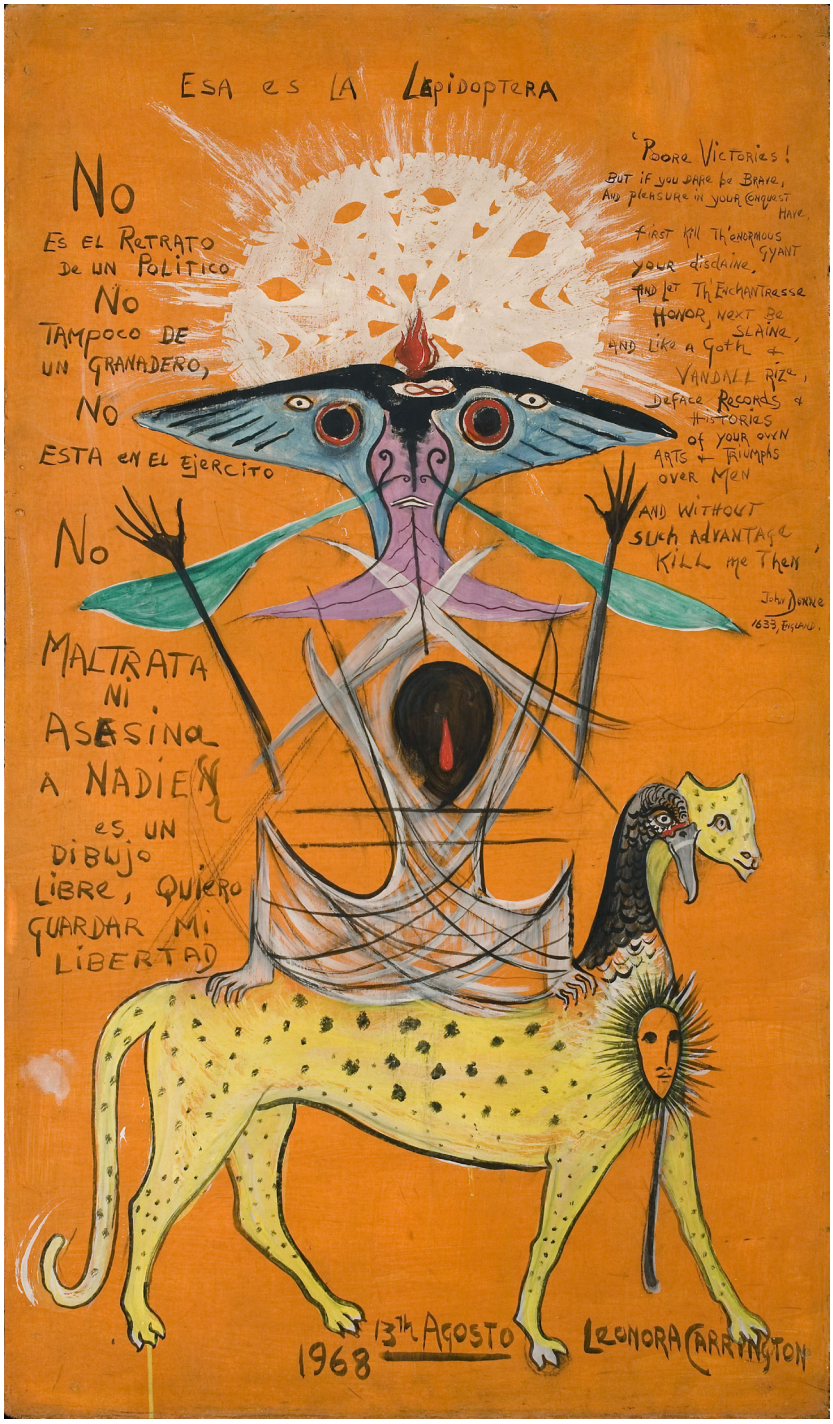

Fig. 3. Leonora Carrington, *Lepidóptera*, 1968, mixed technique on Masonite, 48 x 27 1/2 inches (122 x 70 cm). Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco © Estate of Leonora Carrington / ADAGP, Paris, 2023

negation adverb "No" she establishes a systematic opposition of the *lepidoptera*—an incarnation of her freedom of expression—to state violence exerted by executive power, the police and the army. Carrington expresses herself openly, in the first person, and convokes her own artistic freedom, demonstrating her solidarity not only with the protesters but also with the demands of that part of the cultural milieu that contested the stranglehold of the state over artistic institutions, especially in the context of the forthcoming Cultural Olympiad.[40]

A few days after the Tlatelolco massacre, Carrington's name appeared on a list of 500 intellectuals suspected of supporting the revolts, published by the writer Elena Garro in the national newspaper *Excélsior*. Fearing retaliation, Carrington decided to leave Mexico for a time, traveling to Chicago and New Orleans with her two sons. She did not return to Mexico until a year later, after the political situation had settled. The dramatic events of 1968 inaugurated a series of journeys for her, back and forth between Mexico and the United States during the 1970s. It was during this period that Carrington encountered the second wave of U.S. feminism, in particular through her friendship with Gloria Feman Orenstein, an academic and a member of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

The artist had always been preoccupied with the condition and role of women in modern society; this concern operates as a common thread linking all of her artistic pursuits, through the metamorphoses of bodies and redefinition of the human. In 1970, Carrington wrote a programmatic essay soberly titled "The Emancipation of Women" (also known as "What is a Woman?") in which she advocates for a profound epistemological change. Positioning herself as a "Female Human Animal" subject, she critically underlines the exhaustion of so-called universal notions of Humanism and Anthropocentrism, and offers a perspective that encapsulates the destruction of the environment and the exploitation of women by men through the ages. She starts with a clear statement about the inexorability of environmental catastrophe, and calls for an awakening of consciousness and a revision of Western thinking:

> Since civilization is rolling quickly toward absolute destruction for Earth, blind inane massive suicide for all living beings, the last hope is an act of will to step out of the mechanical trap and refuse. This will could produce a medium for evolution. If all the Women of the world decide to control the population, to refuse war, to refuse discrimination based on Sex or Race and thus force men to allow life to survive on this planet, that would be a miracle indeed.[41]

In 1971, when Orenstein introduced Carrington at NOW meetings in New York, Carrington introduced new feminist issues, such as the revaluation of nature, paganism, animals and witchcraft, thus reinserting spirituality into a fundamentally

urban and politicized feminist movement in a Marxist way. According to Orenstein's testimony, "She was very ecofeminist and we weren't up to that yet. She was very ahead of her time. And now I realize it, looking back on it, she taught me everything I know. She knew it all! There she was drawing the chakras and talking about women's psychic evolution."[42] Even before ecofeminism became a mainstream strand of activist thought in the 1980s, Carrington advocated for the restoration of harmony and sacredness to a global environment damaged by centuries of patriarchal blindness, individualism, supremacy and domination.

When she returned to Mexico City in 1972, enriched by these encounters with the militant U.S. scene, Carrington designed the poster *Mujeres conciencia* (Women's Awareness), for the recently created Mexican branch of the Women's Liberation Movement (Fig. 4).[43] It depicts a reinterpretation of the Judeo-Christian myth of original sin and represents two Eves standing under the tree of life. Through the creation of an alternative belief system, the tree is at the same time a crucifix, an ankh sign and universal feminine symbol, while the snake, traditionally associated with evil, is transformed into the incarnation of the pre-Columbian god *Quetzalcoatl*. Each Eve offers the other one an apple, which is no longer considered forbidden fruit but rather as a source of wisdom, in a symbolic transfer of knowledge from and for women. Nonetheless the dominant lines of the composition integrate the two figures into a broader network of metamorphoses, binding together all forms of life on earth, whether human, animal, vegetal or even spiritual. In this way, Carrington places exchange at the core of her feminist thought and incites us to rethink the subject, no longer in terms of hierarchy, but as a web of interdependencies that binds us to each other as a whole.

Leonora Carrington's surrealist iconography resonates with the activist milieu of the time .Through the contributions of Gloria Feman Orenstein and Whitney Chadwick, among others, and particularly through *The Feminist Art Journal,* feminist historiography worked on the scientific valorization of the artist. In the era of the Anthropocene and posthuman thinking, the emergency of social, political and ecological issues raised by the artist is more relevant than ever to the contemporary viewer; her call for *Conciencia* is now being echoed in new artistic and curatorial practices. One example of Carrington's mentoring influence is to be found in the 59th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, entitled "The Milk of Dream," after a storybook by the artist. Curated by Cecilia Alemani, the exhibition initiated a collective and transversal dialogue on the definition of the (in)human, and invited us to approach contemporary challenges through the prism of the imagination.

Epilogue

Carrington's many contributions to the Mexican neo-avant-garde demonstrate the vitality of Surrealism and its ability to reinvent itself in the cultural

Fig. 4. Leonora Carrington, *Mujeres Conciencia*, 1972, gouache on cardboard, 29 1/2 x 19 5/16 inches (75 x 49 cm). Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco © Estate of Leonora Carrington / ADAGP, Paris, 2023

context of the 1960s. Characterized by a shared aspiration for philosophical, political and aesthetic rupture, as well as for the overcoming of national concerns, the collaborations between Mexican artists and European Surrealists revaluated spirituality through the performative character of art. They challenged Western cultural hegemony, and presented the self as an integrated part of a wider ecosystem. Thus, they called into question traditionally accepted hierarchies, helping us to rethink the artistic canon in postwar Latin America. They also inaugurated a dynamic of absorption and resemantization, not only of avant-garde precepts, but also of the avant-gardes themselves.

In her challenge to the common misconception that exiled surrealists were a secluded community, as well as to the presumed anachronism of surrealist practices in Mexico, Leonora Carrington's highly personal universe decenters the categories of gender, age and class beyond national borders. It resonates with new generations of artists who do not hesitate to assimilate, transcend, mock (sometimes) and question (always) the authority of their foremother. In doing so through their artistic experiments, they continue to write and expand new narratives of Surrealism, where radical dreams are made tangible.

1 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 61.
2 In this respect, the author argues that "the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardist intentions". Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde,* 58.
3 André Breton in Rafael Heliodoro Valle, "Diálogo con André Breton," *Universidad: Mensual de cultura popular*, t. V, no. 29 (June 1938): 6.
4 Luis Mario Schneider, *México y el surrealismo (1925-1950)* (Mexico City: Arte y Libros, 1978), 180; my translation.
5 The *Ruptura* movement is often presented as a monolithic block of artistic opposition to the Mexican School of Painting and encompasses all contemporary artistic manifestations between 1950 and 1970. This dichotomous narrative has largely obscured the artistic and cultural diversity of the time. Pilar García, "Cartography," in the catalogue of the exhibition *Defying Stability. Artistic Processes in Mexico, 1952-1967*, March 27 to August 3, 2014 (Mexico City: Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, 2014), 23.
6 Until the 1950s, galleries were scarce in Mexico City, the Miraschi Gallery and the Galería de Arte Mexicano, founded in 1933 and 1935 respectively, were the only ones leading the art scene. In 1951, the Prisse Gallery opened its doors to young artists, followed by the Tussó Gallery. Later, Alberto Gironella created the Proteo Gallery in 1954, in competition with Antonio Souza's gallery, which opened two years later. Finally, the galleries of Juan Martín (1961) and the Pecanins sisters (1964) helped to strengthen the reputation of these new generations of artists. On this subject, see Rita Eder, *La Generación de la Ruptura y sus antecedentes* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012). Jorge Alberto Manrique and Teresa del Conde, *Una mujer en el arte mexicano. Memorias de Inés Amor* (Mexico City: UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1987). Or Delmari Romero Keith, *Galería de Antonio Souza. Vanguardia de una época* (Mexico City: El Equilibrista, 1992).
7 Stephanie d'Alessandro and Matthew Gale, "The World in the Time of the Surrealists," in *Surrealism Beyond Borders*, exhibition catalogue (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2022), 19. The exhibition "Surrealism Beyond Borders" was on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from October 4, 2021, to January 30, 2022, and at the Tate Modern, London, from February 25 to August 29, 2022.
8 Alejandro Jodorowsky, *El maestro y las magas* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2009).
9 Jodorowsky, *El maestro y las magas*, 64, my translation.
10 Alejandro Jodorowsky, *Teatro sin fin (tragedias, comedias y mimodramas)* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2007), 400, my translation.
11 Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Recovering Panic," in *The Age of Discrepancies. Art and Visual Culture in Mexico 1968-1997*, ed. Olivier Debroise and Cuauhtémoc Medina (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Turner, 2014, 2nd edition), 97. Among the artists of this "new baroque" he includes, along with Jodorowsky, the design artist Pedro Friedeberg, the surrealist Alan Glass and the film director Gelsen Glas.
12 The expression Panic is inspired by the god Pan, god of excess, priapism, laughter and fury. Simultaneously terrible and comic, orgiastic and multiple, he embodies, the very meaning of what Jodorowsky calls the "panic party" or "panic euphoria." See Jodorowsky, *Teatro Pánico*, with drawings of José Luis Cuevas (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1965).
13 Note that Carrington was already familiar with the theatrical milieu. She participated in the Poesía en Voz Alta theater group in 1956 and 1957 alongside the Mexican writers Octavio Paz, Juan José Arreola and Carlos Fuentes and the painter Juan Soriano; she designed the costumes and set for Paz's sole theatrical work, an adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Rappacini's Daughter*, and published several plays of her own.
14 Jodorowsky, *Teatro sin fin (tragedias, comedias y mimodramas)*, 402-429. There is a second version of this text entitled "El príncipe azul Cucú," signed only by Leonora Carrington. Although this second version is not dated, it was published for the first time in 1961 in *Cuadernos de Bellas Artes*, and a second

time in 1986 in *México en el arte*. It is then difficult to determine which of the two texts was written first. See Leonora Carrington, "El príncipe azul Cucú," *Cuadernos de Bellas Artes*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Feburary 1961): 5-40, and Leonora Carrington, "El príncipe azul Cucú," *México en el arte*, no. 14 (Fall 1986): 55-63.

15 The character of the rocking horse Tartarus can be seen throughout her entire oeuvre. It first appears in the late 1930s in her 1937 *Self-Portrait* in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, or in the story *The Oval Lady*, written in French and first published in 1939. The plot of *Penelope* is strongly inspired by these two works, especially its outcome. See Leonora Carrington, *La Dame Ovale*, with seven illustrations by Max Ernst (Paris, GLM, 1939),and Leonora Carrington, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1937-1938, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/492697, accessed May 9, 2022.

16 Abigail Susik, "The alchemy of surrealist presence in Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain,*" in *Surrealism and Film after 1945:Absolutely Modern Mysteries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 186-206. On the influence of Tarot game on Carrington's work, see Susan L. Aberth et al., *The Tarot of Leonora Carrington* (Lopen: Fulgur Press, 2020).

17 Jodorowsky, *Teatro sin fin*, 401, my translation.

18 Mara Reyes (pseudonym for Marcela del Río), "Diorama teatral," *Diorama de la Cultura*, cultural supplement *Excélsior*, September 17, 1961, 2-4. Armando de María y Campos, "De *Penélope* a *La otra viuda alegre,*" *Novedades*, September 13, 1961, no numbers, my translation. Also see Lya Engel, "El próximo estreno de 'Penélope' será una sensación," *Impacto*, no. 602, September 6, 1961, 75. Bertha Lomell, "Ante el estreno de 'Penélope'," *Mañana*, Septembre 16, 1961, no numbers. Lya Engel, "'Penélope' el estreno," *Impacto*, no. 604, September 20, 1961, 48-51. Or the November-December 1961 issue of Anita Brenner's review, *Mexico This Month*, which dedicated its cover and a special dossier to Leonora Carrington and her work *Penelope*.

19 Armando de María y Campos, "*Penélope*, teatro surrealista, en el escenario de la Esfera," *Novedades*, September 11, 1961, no numbers, my translation.

20 See Lya Engel, "Teatro," *Impacto*, no. 620, January 17, 1962, 45.

21 This is evidenced by the violent reactions to his productions of Becket's *Endgame* in 1960 or the censorship of his version of Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata* in 1961, Fernando Arrabal's *Fando y Lis* (1961) and his own play, *La ópera del orden* (The Opera of Order) in June 1962, the first appearance of the Panic Group of Mexico.

22 Joanne Pottlitzer, "Una exorcista 'ordinaria'," in *Leonora Carrington. Cuentos Mágicos* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Museo del Palacio de Bellas Artes, 2018), 364, my translation.

23 They collaborated once again for an adaptation of Ionesco's *Exit the King* without changing the formula: Carrington with the costumes and set design, and Jodorowsky with the staging. The play premiered at the Hidalgo Theater on January 11, 1968.

24 Cited by Abigail Susik, "The alchemy of surrealist presence in Alejandro Jodorowsky's *The Holy Mountain,*" 198.

25 Among them were the creators of the Panic Movement (Alejandro Jodorowsky, Roland Topor, Fernando Arrabal), painters from the *Ruptura* (José Luis Cuevas), writers of the so-called *Generación de Medio Siglo* (Salvador Elizondo, Juan García Ponce, Jorge Ibargüengoitia) and film critics gathered around the *Nuevo Cine* journal (Emilio García Riera, José de la Colina, Jomi García Ascot).

26 Florence Olivier, "S.NOB (1962-1963), revue du groupe de la Casa del Lago," *América: Cahiers du CRICCAL. Le discours culturel dans les revues latino-américaines, 1940-1970*, no. 9-10 (1992): 170, my translation.

27 Michel Foucault*, Histoire de la sexualité 3 : Le souci de soi* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 138.

28 See Salvador Elizondo, "Morfeo o la decadencia del sueño," *S.NOB*, no. 7 (October 15, 1962): 2-9.

29 On the Bataillean aesthetic of *S.NOB* see David Murrieta Flores, "Bateillean Surrealism in Mexico: *S.NOB* Magazine (1962)," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2020): 120-151.

30 See Elva Peniche Montfort, "Fantasías eróticas, sueños ocultos y afanes libertinos. Cuerpo y

transgresión en la revista S.nob (1962)," in *Genealogías del arte contemporáneo en México 1952-1967,* ed. Rita Eder, 133-159.
31 See Kati Horna, "Fetiche 1. Oda a la Necrofilia," *S.NOB*, no. 2 (June 27, 1962): 21-25. "Fetiche 2. Impromptu con arpa," *S.NOB*, no. 4 (July 11, 1962): 13-17. And "Fetiche 4," *S.NOB*, no. 7 (October 15, 1962): 25-28.
32 Leonora Carrington, "De cómo funde una industria o el sarcófago de hule," *S.NOB,* no. 3 (July 4, 1962): 16.
33 Carrington, "De cómo funde una industria o el sarcófago de hule," 18. Read in its original version, "Unidos Se Amolamos" (U.S.A) and "Ustedes Regresarán Solos (a sus) Sepulcros" (U.S.S.R). An English version of this tale is available in Leonora Carrington, *The Seventh Horse and Other Tales* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), 184-186.
34 Ibid.
35 Jonathan P. Eburne, "Leonora Carrington, Mexico and the Culture of Death," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, vol. 5, no. 1-2 (2011): 29.
36 "Iconographia Snobarium," *S.NOB,* no. 3 (July 4, 1962): 19-21.
37 Abigail Susik, "Losing one's head in the 'Children's Corner': Carrington's contribution to *S.NOB* in 1962," in *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 109.
38 "[...] the journal was similar in presentation and content to the publications in Europe around 1939-1945 (*K. Revue de la poésie*, *De l'humour à la terreur*, *Neon*, *1948*, etc.). *S.nob*, which aimed at the systematic destruction of the traditional concepts of culture, adhered more than any other journal ever published in Mexico to the program of the European surrealists. However, it had the misfortune of appearing twenty years too late and falling into the void. The situation, the problems and the mentality had changed." Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, *El surrealismo y el arte fantástico en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1969), 104, my translation. On Rodríguez Prampolini's paradoxical reception of Surrealism, see Luis M. Castañeda, "Surrealism and National Identity in Mexico: Changing Perceptions, 1940-1968," *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, vol. 3, no. 1-2 (2009): 9-29.
39 Leonora Carrington, *Lepidóptera,*1968, mixed technique on masonite, 48 x 27 1/2 inches (122 x 70 cm). Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco; my translation.
40 A few days before, on August 9, 1968, thirty-five contemporary artists, including Leonora Carrington, symbolically refused the invitation of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes to collaborate in the "Exposición Solar" organized for the Games of the XIX Olympiad. In an open letter published in the national press, they denounced the conditions of organization and especially the criteria of selection of the artists and the attribution of the prizes, considered an attack on their creative freedom and a subordination to a mercantile conception of art. Although there is no explicit mention of the social protests in the letter, many artists supported the student protest and frequently attended the University cultural institutions such as the Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte. See Pilar García de Germenos, "The *Salón Independiente*: A New Reading," in *The Age of Discrepancies. Art and Visual Culture in Mexico 1968-1997*, ed. Olivier Debroise and Cuauhtémoc Medina, 51.
41 First published in Mexico in 1970, the English version quoted here is from *Cultural Correspondence*, no. 12-14 (1981): 89-90.
42 See Terri Geis, "Leonora Carrington in the 1970s: An Interview with Gloria Feman Orenstein," *Nierika. Revista de estudios de arte*, no. 1 (June 2012): 16-25.
43 Leonora Carrington, *Mujeres Conciencia*, 1972. Gouache on cardboard. 29 1/2 x 19 5/16 inches (75 x 49 cm). Courtesy of Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco.