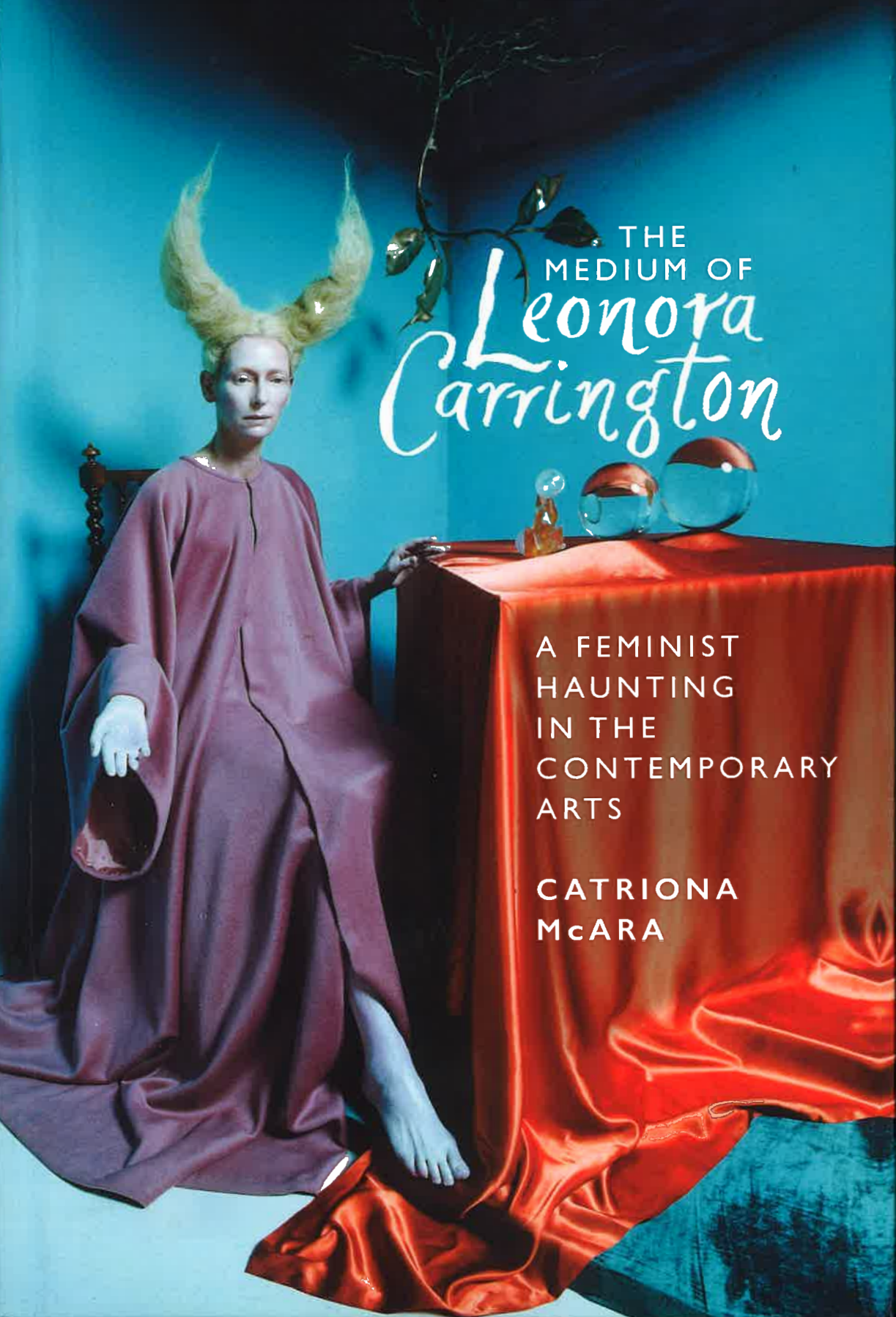

THE
MEDIUM OF
Leonora
Carrington
A FEMINIST
HAUNTING
IN THE
CONTEMPORARY
ARTS
CATRIONA
McARA

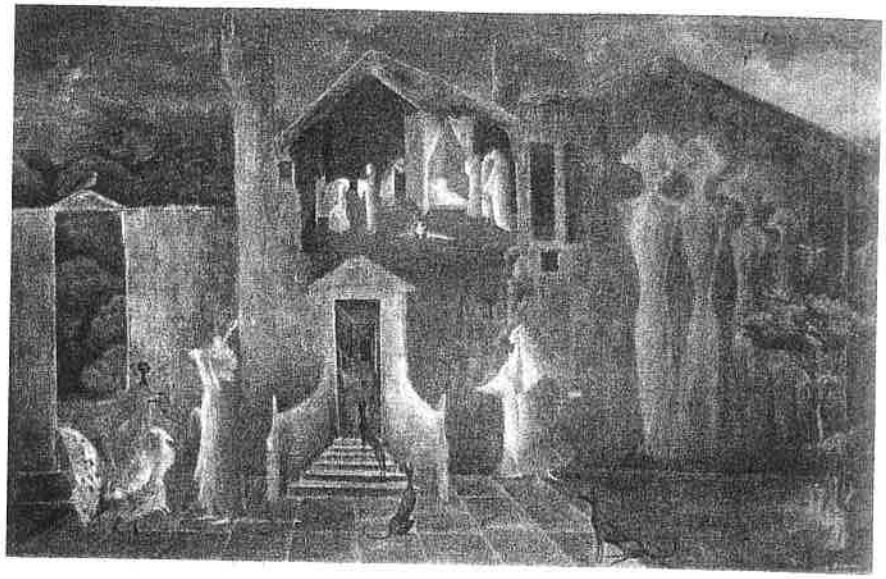
6

Edgework

> Inhabiting these pages are odd boundary creatures ... These boundary creatures are, literally, monsters, a word that shares more than its root with the word, to demonstrate.
>
> —Donna J. Haraway (1991)[1]

On a former dairy farm in Ashfield, rural Massachusetts, a radical metamorphosis, amounting to a paradigm shift, is occurring, involving the practical application of our elusive subject's eco-feminism and the re-embodiment of her characters and artistic principles. Through long-term study of her multifaceted iconography, Double Edge Theatre present a microcosm of Leonora Carrington's thinking as a lifestyle choice. Devised, directed, and created by international artistic director, Stacy Klein, *Leonora's World* (2018) offers an immersive autumn spectacle where select artworks by Carrington are transformed into a series of theatrical tableaux. The weather and elemental factors have led the company out of doors: in the trees, through the carefully tended gardens, down the stream, around the labyrinth, and through the pond. The whole complex has been meticulously landscaped and tenderly cultivated in order to bring Carrington's visual narratives and eccentric archetypes to the forefront of the critical imagination.

Since 1982, Klein has become known for her feminist theatre company—her directorial debut presented an all-woman cast and crew for *Rites*, a contemporary reinterpretation of the *Bacchae*, set in an English lavatory. "Double Edge" itself is named after the double-edged axe wielded by the priestesses (or Bacchae) who served Dionysus, the god of theatre. Klein's approach also has origins stemming from the Eastern European tradition of theatre. Polish theatre-maker and actor, Rena Mirecka, has been one of Klein's mentors since 1976, and a sun shrine has been installed in the heart of Double Edge Theatre's grounds in her honour. Mirecka herself was a founding actor of Jerzy Grotowski's experimental school of theatre, Teatr Laboratorium. Grotowski's poor theatre would seem the very opposite of the rich esotericism represented by Carrington, two tendencies that are difficult to reconcile, but again one might think back to those spare, inverted conceptual strategies

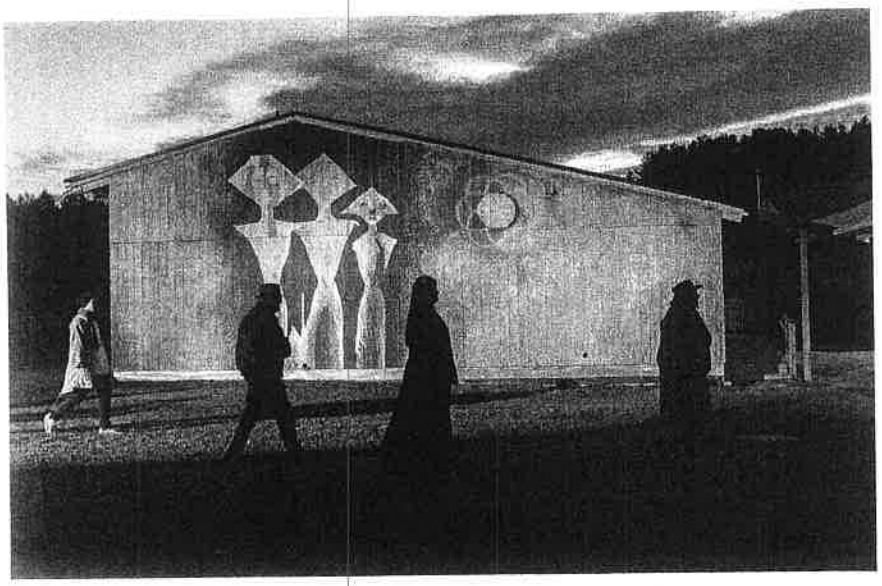


29 Leonora Carrington, *The Dog Child of Monkton Priori*, 1950

deployed by Lucy Skaer and Tilda Swinton to work through their known interests in Carrington as an artistic medium. Klein explains how her own approach to theatre direction has developed:

> The way we use the whole farm in the spectacles—the pastures, the barn, the pond, the trees—is a big change from my early work which used to be much more "poor theatre," the images drawn by the actors alone. Now I design and paint in full color. The land has given me a sense of place—a humble understanding that we humans are a small part of life, full of wildness and hope. Still, while I love creating the spectacles, I also need to return to the inner work of the imagination.[2]

As with Carrington's long-term dissociation from surrealism, over time Klein has detached herself from her foundational poor theatre training in order to immerse herself more fully in her imagination and a more layered, colourful approach to the *mise-en-scène*. Like Carrington, Double Edge welcome high theatre and deep narrative. For Double Edge, further techniques for their adaptations include iconographic extraction and relocation for their distinctive mode of promenade theatre. The archive room in their bespoke pavilion includes over 39 years of material relating to the history of the company, and demonstrates a spatial commitment to research, and how a scholarly community underpins the overarching thinking and programming of the company. A major part of the display in this archival resource



30 Michelangelo Noel Aurello, mural for Double Edge Theatre, 2018

is a giant mood board, a collage that transforms Carrington's artworks into a series of *tableaux vivants*. Such "living pictures" are consistent with the company's political emphasis of "living culture." This is followed through in the topographical approach to the programme, a map indicating where the selected scenes will be performed, leaving audience members enough choice and agency with which to shape their journey. Indeed, Carrington's detailed scenes lend themselves readily to theatrical adaptation.

That the majority of actors are women or those who identify as gender non-binary further speaks of the role model the artist has become in the age of #MeToo.[3] Carrington's aesthetic recipe offers both matriarchy and de-hierarchy, both being useful strands of revisionary thinking for the promotion of minority views. In the aftermath of Hillary Clinton's concession speech (2016), Klein henceforth resolved to have a woman and/or gender non-binary person cast in the lead role in all Double Edge productions as an act of resistance. Double Edge were looking for a Latin American woman to follow, and Leonora Carrington became apparent as their posthumous figurehead, described by one reviewer as a "free-spirited Anglo-Mexican painter-sculptor-feminist-mystic."[4] "I am in a Carrington-cycle," Klein tells me.[5] Having previously worked through a *Marc Chagall* cycle (2010–15), Klein was already invested in a visual realm and close study of the art history. While Klein's feminist attitude had long been present in the company's underlying philosophy and in her own practice since at least the 1980s, her *Leonora* cycle represents the stepping up of commitment to a radical politics that seeks to bring about structural change, both within, as well as beyond, the liminal nature of performance. Again, the mission statement of "living culture" commits Double Edge to embedding the ethics of artmaking at every level, including farming the very land on which they live and work; harvesting fruit from the orchard and growing vegetables in the produce garden, as well as keeping chickens for eggs and providing a sanctuary for rare goats—all spaces that double as theatrical platforms. There is thus also a de-anthropocentricism at play, one that seeks to work in harmony with the non-human.[6] Klein and the ensemble champion local, sustainable politics and a model of direct democracy. In a recent 'in conversation', Klein made their world mission clear:

> I think local is the only way we are going to transform our society, and that doesn't mean we can't have huge exchanges in other places, it just means that our focus needs to be on the local and whatever that means to people because we really need to grow our communities and strengthen our communities, and for me it has totally been proven, and over and over again, everyday there is another effort.[7]

The ensemble, thus, shares Carrington's practice of esotericism and eco-political concerns, embedding her ideas into their own thinking. Over the last three to four years especially, their work has attempted to get inside her imagination and live her politics.

The sheer abundance of research for the project further demonstrates this level of commitment. Carrington expert Susan L. Aberth was brought on as a consultant and notes that Klein "had already purchased not only the primary texts on this artist but many of the more obscure as well. These items were worn with use, tagged with notes, and clearly had been carefully read and memorized."[8] In Klein's office, books about tarot, folklore, puppets, and the historical significance of masks mingle with rare exhibition catalogues and compendiums of essays on Carrington. Again, such literature is followed through in a dedicated study centre, which is by and large a homage to Klein's mentors, Mirecka and Carrington, among others. Indeed, Carrington becomes a connecting principle for Klein, a force that binds all these props and theatrical devices and brings people together.

The fact that Carrington herself designed and wrote for theatre is noteworthy and positions her as an even more apt choice. One thinks of her numerous plays: 'The Invention of Molé' (*c.*1960), 'The Holy Oily Body' (co-written with Remedios Varo, 1956), 'Penélope' (co-written with Alejandro Jodorowsky, *c.*1957), and 'Opus Siniestrus: The Story of the Last Egg' (1970).[9] Scriptwriting and set design were necessary expressive vehicles

in Carrington's sense of world-building and present a case for her entire *œuvre* as a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Moreover, Carrington's interest in and fabrication of masks is also of crucial interest to Double Edge Theatre, who place a powerful emphasis on this theatrical device in order to summon a sense of character. For example, one of the tomes on display in the archive room is Andreas Lommel's multicultural study, *Masks: Their Meaning and Function* (1981): "Originally, every mask was imbued with significance, and the mask itself or the person wearing it mysteriously represented some power or spirit."[10] The mask is a performance object, a conduit that imbues the wearer with the power to channel magical transformations, which is why they are so often used in rituals and rites, practices to which Carrington and Double Edge Theatre both subscribe. One might also recall the symbolism in Carrington's short story 'The Debutante' (1937), where the hyena tears off the face of the maid to wear as a disguise to the social obligation of the coming-out ball.[11] In any context, the mask is an uncanny object—when one dons a mask, and peeps through its eyeholes, one becomes me/not-me. Poet and cultural theorist Susan Stewart tells us: "the mask, the costume, and the disguise find their proper context in carnival and festivity ... where hierarchy is overturned."[12] Again, such overturning of hierarchies is of keen interest to both parties and one might think through the alternative logic of the hybrid, carnivalesque, and grotesque. Stewart further notes the connecting forces of quotation and carnival as mutual "process[es] of restoration and disillusionment, for the boundary of the text is both fixed and made suspect," surely a definition for the kind of theatre presented here.[13] Bill Marx writes that *Leonora's World* is "[a]s close to Mikhail Bakhtin's anarchistic vision of carnival as New England is ever going to get."[14] By prising open these marvellous coordinates, Double Edge Theatre guide audiences to a site where Carrington's feminist intertextual grotesque is released.

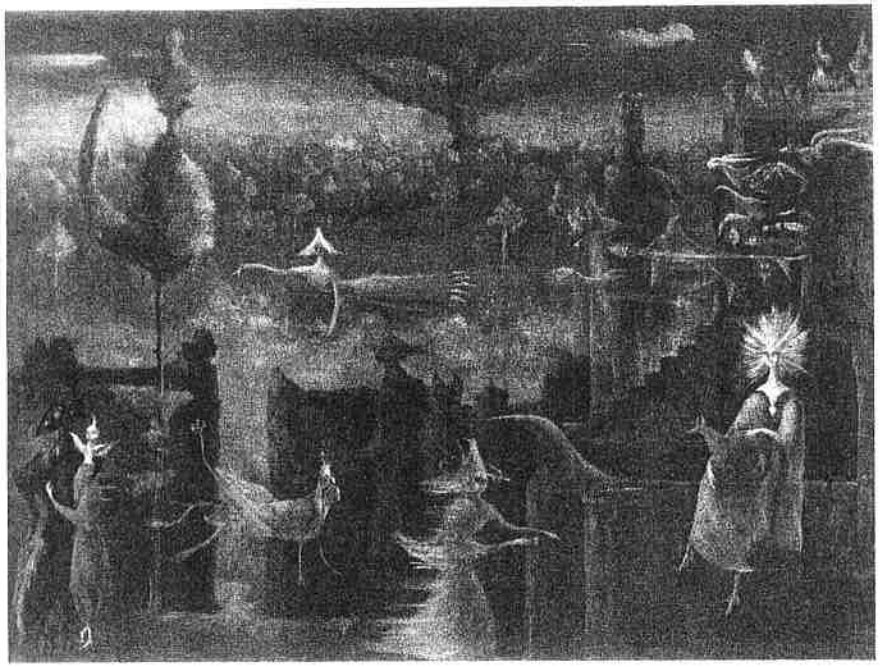
Harvest surrealism

> The effects are riveting: this is not carnival; it is magic.
>
> —Jonathan P. Eburne (2019)[15]

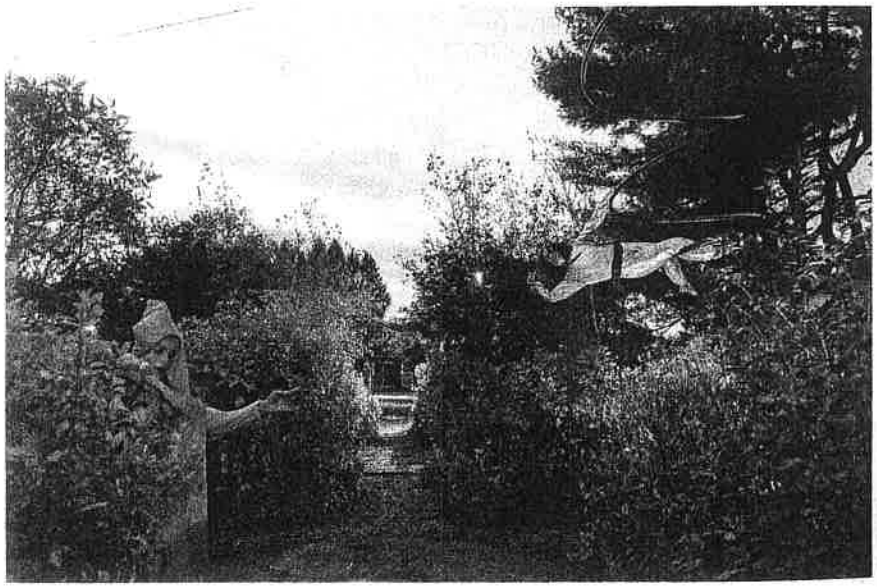
Let's bring this performance back to the present tense. The scene is twilight on the evening of 11 October 2019. Upon arrival, the Carrington theme is immediately apparent in the shape of a large mural by Michelangelo Noel Aurello (Figure 30) that has combined iconographic details from her paintings, *The Dog Child of Monkton Priori* (1950) (Figure 29) and *Hod's Polyèdre* (1965) (Figure 5). Carrington's portrait has been inscribed onto the tallest apparition of elongated figures alongside the geometric motif from the latter painting. The sensibly dressed audience have been equipped

with their programme, a map of the farm based on Carrington's schematic drawing from *Down Below* (1944). The curation of this outdoor museum is partly audience-led. Carrington is played by co-artistic director Jennifer Johnson, who appears nonchalantly in androgynous riding garb as in the famous self-portrait, *Inn of the Dawn Horse* (1937). She serves as a guide throughout *Leonora's World*, beckoning the audience through scene after scene. Appropriately, Johnson begins the journey by leading us through the yellow-curtained proscenium, a portal to the outdoor realm. The audience are offered a choice of two directions left and right. We are immersed instantaneously in this otherworldly space and are witnessing what feels like a harvest ritual. In front of me, a tall, feline creature straight out of *Are You Really Syrious?* (1953) roams around a small field. Its stilted limbs elegantly patrol and traverse this magical terrain. Alongside this Syrious cat character, I recognise the elaborate moon-face of *The Giantess* (1947), another companion on stilts. Monumentally doll-like, she is a paradox like the painting, gliding her way around, commanding the space. Suddenly, I find myself in a fairy-tale forest, an ornamental garden in which a flurry of medieval sprites are dashing around. One is in a tree house playing a glockenspiel, while another is upside down within a spiral trapeze, flying! The frantic spirits of the painting *Nine Nine Nine* (1948) (Figure 31) are conjured as if by an act of sorcery, and dash about the ornamental garden. Further theatrical realisations of Carrington's well-known paintings and sculptures await us in the scenes that follow.

The protagonist reappears, this time in a black cloak with a ram-horn headdress denoting an older, visionary Carrington. She quotes from her subject in a deep, English accent: "Time was, time is, time has passed," a potent anachronism from the drawing, *Brothers and sisters have I none* (1942). The next time I see her, she is carrying the ubiquitous glowing egg that appears in numerous paintings from Carrington's mid-career, including *Ab Eo Quod* (1956) and *Who Art Thou White Face?* (1959), as well as her aforementioned play, 'Opus Siniestrus.' Meanwhile, an alchemist, immersed in consulting his books and potions, weighs two glass spheres on a pair of brass scales hanging from a tree. A typewriter is positioned by a small bonfire. Across the river, I spy *The Temptation of St Anthony* (1945); the tall white figure of the hermit saint dwarfs the water carrier standing nearby. The congregation next to the saint in the painting process towards me with tambourines and flowing garments.[16] They are chanting and humming soothingly. This gathering will recur later. Chance encounters are frequent in this semi-structured yet improvisational approach to theatre. I find myself at the heart of a wordless, yet profound, dialogue between a cloaked figure from Carrington's *Tower of Nagas* (1991) (Figure 33) based on the Hermit card in tarot, played by Argentinian co-artistic director, Carlos Uriona, and



31 Leonora Carrington, *Nine Nine Nine*, 1948



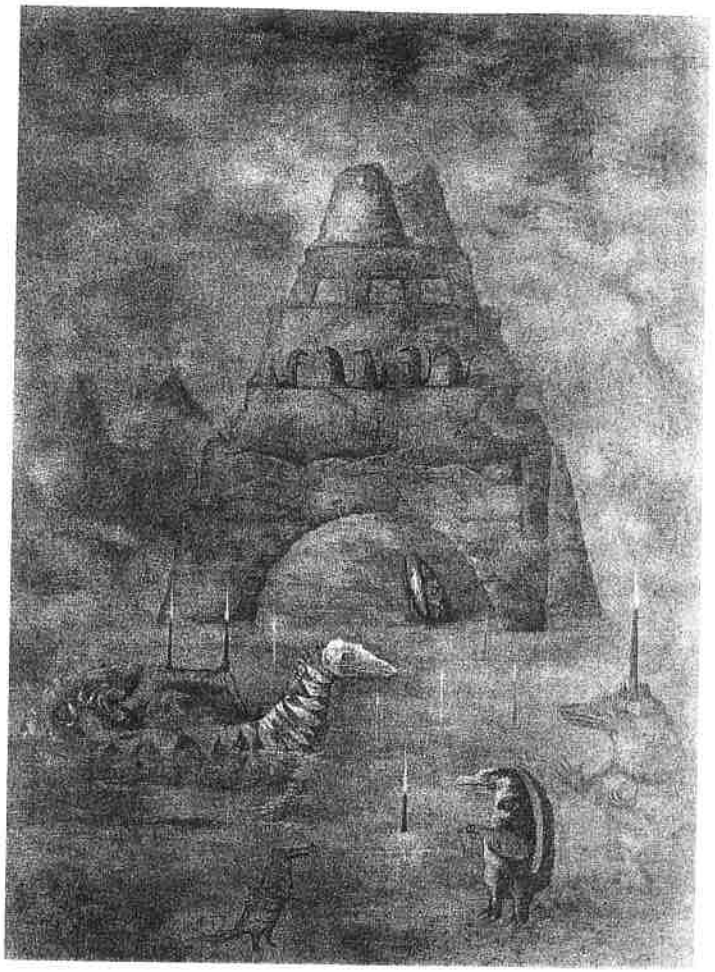
32 Double Edge Theatre, *Leonora's World*, 2019

a sorceress performed by Nipmuc actor, Jasmine Goodspeed—a convergence of cultural backgrounds brought about through this fantasy encounter.[17] This is what Carrington's work is capable of enabling—think of her multicultural, archaeological comingling in *El Mundo Mágico de los Mayas* (*The Magical World of the Mayas*, 1963). As Carrington herself wrote in *The Stone Door* (1976), which underpins much of Klein's thinking: "The frontiers onto the unknown are constructed in layers. One layer opens into a fan of other layers which open new worlds in turn."[18] Double Edge adapt this conceptual challenge to offer an enticing sense of what might happen if two or more of Carrington's detailed in-scapes were to collide or overlap. Moreover, the longevity of Carrington's art history and eight-decade career is at times collapsed anachronistically into a matter of minutes.

I wander past a malevolent picnic in progress, conjoined thinking from Carrington's paintings *Pastoral* (1950) (Figure 20) and *Edwardian Hunt Breakfast* (1956), and possibly also *Pomps of the Subsoil* (1947) and the painting version of *Down Below* (1941), depending on one's mood and how one chooses to interact with this. I cross over to an epic earthwork re-creation of the *Labyrinth* (1991). Appropriately, the sun is still setting as I enter, and when I finally exit, the seasonal lights have gone out. I loop around two concentric spirals—creatures, masks, and golden orbs emerge through the undergrowth. There is an exhibit to see around every corner, something to surprise, delight, and tempt. This gigantic temporary structure makes reference to an archaeological sense of ancient theatre. I reach the centre and find a soldier-like figure frozen mid-pose. He then comes to life and guides us out of this Fibonacci-like maze. A horn, presumably borrowed from the imagery of *The Hearing Trumpet,* sounds a short, tribalistic blast summoning us on to the next chapter. We emerge from this domain and are beckoned into the baby barn where dioramas from *Grandmother Moorhead's Kitchen* (1975), and lullaby paintings, *Night Nursery Everything* (Figure 3) and *Neighbourly Advice* (both 1947), can be glimpsed in each of the stables, comprising decorative horse murals in Carrington's signature carousel style by Jeremy Louise Eaton. I notice a sculptural re-creation of *How Doth the Little Crocodile* (2000) on the arbour above and wonder how I missed this before. There is so much to see: a new Carrington vista there; a quotation brough to life there; a unique happening in every direction. My eyes are hungry, yet I find I am starved of time. And then I am confronted by a lone figure, a jester from *El Juglar* (1954). We lock eye contact. They are exquisitely beautiful, glittering and haunting in their pierrot collar, twinkling in the sudden darkness which has enveloped us. They make strange, unhuman noises and gestures in semaphore. Reluctant to leave them, I realise I am at the tail end of the audience queue and hurry to the large barn, where a cacophony of voices can be heard, and soup is being served.

I am now inside *The House Opposite* (1945). Bird-actors with Venetian beak masks are in the rafters squawking and tittering, and our protagonist communes with them, crooning back and conducting this feminist-surrealist orchestra. The space is activated and the energy in the room is palpable in every nook and cranny, mimicking the compartmentalised scenes of the dollhouse architecture in the painting. The overarching soundscape is hewn from the alchemical and gnostic language found within *The Stone Door*. By my count, in the painting there are approximately 15 matriarchs and young girls, as well as their familiars, which are predominantly domesticated animals such as birds and cats. This is carried over into those performing within this particular domestic set as a feminist command of space.[19] We might recall that Tere Arcq points out that the original painting depicts "a house inhabited only by women," and, in the case of Klein's vision, this category of "woman" is expanded to include members of the queer and trans community.[20] As for Heidi Sopinka and Chloe Aridjis, Double Edge use this scene as a space with which to present a feminist ecosystem.

Throughout the spectacle, I am particularly struck by the multisensory, elemental nature of the performance. The shamanic soundscape is augmented by the smells and tastes of woodsmoke and spicy soup. *Leonora's World* could be said to present a kind of harvest surrealism; the performance is carefully timed in relation to the seasonal, lunar cycle, and occurs deliberately at twilight. There are phantasmagorical dimensions to the penultimate scenes, conjuring a sense of ancientness and inheritance of magical practices and bonfire-lit storytelling traditions. We are led outside through a back door in the large barn towards the pond for the finale. The gallows of *The Gibbet Birds* (1971) add an ominous atmosphere to the penultimate procession. In the distance, one can perceive the precarious rocking and frantic activities found aboard the chequered ship in the *Nunscape in Manzanillo* (1956). The mood of trepidation is quickly dispelled by another enchanting spectacle. The scene is a fairy-tale woodland pond illuminated by a soft green light. The colours seem to shore up Carrington eco-feminism as presented in her predominately green poster, *Mujeres conciencia* (*Women's Awareness*) (1972). The poster includes a soaring, winged creature, and pre-empts Double Edge Theatre's philosophy by representing a double-Eve, one black woman, one white woman, sharing the apple of knowledge.[21] In the closing scene of *Leonora's World*, characters swoop across the scene like comets and a boat full of cardinals sets sail. Carrington becomes a vehicle for imaginative crossings into different dream states. Johnson's Carrington boards the monochromatic crocodile gondola straight out of the iridescent painting *Tower of Nagas* and sails across the pond, proclaiming from *The Stone Door* that "it is a great thing to be errant in time and space."[22]



33 Leonora Carrington, *Tower of Nagas*, 1991

The magician and the teacher

Silence, let us not disturb the mystery.

—Leonora Carrington (*c.*1957)[23]

In the genesis of the Leonora cycle, Double Edge Theatre's indoor production, *Leonora: La Maga y el Maestro*, presents an even earlier stage of creative evolution. Klein reveals that *La Maga y el Maestro* began its journey with Carrington's imagery at its foundations. Through close investigation of Carrington's imagery, the company collaborated to create a "visual script."[24]

The lead actors, Jennifer Johnson and Carlos Uriona, then mined the key texts of their characters, Leonora and Adan (meaning "everyman" as a loose reference to Jodorowsky), including 'The Oval Lady' (1938), *Down Below* (1944), and *The Stone Door* (1976) in Carrington's case, and *The Spiritual Journey of Alejandro Jodorowsky* (2005) and *The Way of Tarot* (2009), among others, for Jodorowsky—sampling key ideas, quotations, and narrative possibilities but ultimately rewriting the raw script as their own. Carrington's texts are duly dominant while Jodorowsky's riddles and tarot were, Klein explains, "layered in as responses."[25] Klein would then edit the developing script along with her fellow dramaturgs in the company.

La Maga y el Maestro translates as "the magician and the teacher," suggesting that this is the story of a sorcerer and her apprentice. Jodorowsky was quick to recognise Carrington as someone whom he might follow as a fantasy guru. Jodorowsky claims that on his quest for eternal life, he encountered Carrington in Mexico: "When I realised that Leonora used the symbols of the Tarot in her work, I begged her to initiate me."[26] In the 'Surrealist Master' chapter of his *Spiritual Journey*, Jodorowsky further explains that his spiritual teacher, Ejo, had encouraged him to seek out a feminine archetype and align himself with Carrington in order to cure himself of his angry childishness.[27] One might see such a pattern repeated in the relationship between Uriona and Klein, whom Uriona chose to follow in terms of showing him the feminist way.[28] Klein and Uriona have long been interested in Latin American artistic precedents, so Jodorowsky's following of Carrington must have appealed to them both as source material. That said, it is important to note that Jodorowsky's devotional model of homage does not necessarily hold true for the range of creative responses to Carrington discussed throughout this book, many of which prefer to dialogue or query. While Double Edge Theatre claim Carrington as a figurehead, they respectfully champion her as a lifestyle choice and research her work in depth in order to produce new and authentic work. It is this level of critical engagement and a sense of working through which saves them from idolisation. This dynamic is borne out in *La Maga y el Maestro* in its careful exploration of re-gendered hierarchies.

Associate artistic director, Travis Coe, plays the Flying Hyena, an evolution of the creature from Carrington's short story, while Amanda Miller plays the ubiquitous Pajaro, a nod to Max Ernst's bird alter ego Loplop from Carrington's early career but a creature Carrington increasingly adopted within her own imagery. The bird and the hyena prowl the stage throughout the show as crucial aspects of Carrington's imaginary bestiary. The cast also includes the Cook, a Trio of Shadows and the Giantess. The set includes multiple movable stairways, designed to mimic the dollhouse architecture in *The House Opposite*, with each compartment functioning as a potential

scene change. As we know, Carrington's painting appears to open a dollhouse façade so that the viewer can witness the multiple storeys, layers, and going-on inside.[29] The eventfulness and myriad scenes coexisting in one image continue to prompt the shape, tempo, and rhythms of *La Maga y el Maestro*. In the set design, iconic details from *The Inn of the Dawn Horse* (1937), such as the rocking horse and yellow-curtained proscenium arch, have been realised in three dimensions. One can also discern key props such as the glowing egg from *Ab Eo Qoud* (1956). Glockenspiels and other analogue percussion contribute to the childlike atmosphere of wonder and the nursery scene presented, though interestingly the majority of the script and events take place when Carrington was an adult woman—Jodorowsky sought Carrington out for counsel in the 1950s when she was in her late thirties/early forties.

In *La Maga y el Maestro*, Carrington's character is quick to demythologise any idea of her perceived surrealist persona as a mad witch. She reads from Lewis Carroll's narrative poem, 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' (1865), before lecturing the Jodorowsky character on the core ideas of ancient knowledge. She describes her childhood self as a ram. There are flashbacks to her time in the sanatorium. When tarot is read, she is surrounded by the chanting shadows from the painting *The Bird Men of Burnley* (1970), who later return as the masked figures in *Lepidopteros* (1969) to help her cast a spell. The play then segues into moments from *The Stone Door* and *The Hearing Trumpet*, including reading a letter from Carmella. At one point both Carrington and Jodorowsky mirror each other in red and blue velvet cloaks. A ram's skull is passed ceremoniously between them before Carrington covers the bird's feet in mustard. Whilst warning of the dangers of over-interpretation and psychoanalysis, she covers the doors with red handprints to represent her menstrual blood that Jodorowsky reports she once used to decorate Luis Buñuel's walls.[30] Then, in her horned headdress, she chants manically over a cauldron, in what is possibly the most malevolent episode in this production, before dancing under the billowing skirts of *The Giantess*. The force field then transforms into the ghostly figures that haunt her many depictions of *Crookhey Hall* (1987). In one of the penultimate scenes, Carrington and Jodorowsky perform a circular dance, the former in white, the latter in black, as if to demonstrate two parts of the whole or sides of the Taoist yin-yang (a symbol which Carrington includes in her tapestries, such as the undated *Beast with a Feline Head*). This offers a prophecy of the final moments in *La Maga y el Maestro* where the stone door is opened, and the Carrington character reveals her true self to be the moon.

Both the indoor and outdoor productions serve as inversions of one another, each a part of the whole. Given that they both form part of Klein's overarching Carrington cycle, it is interesting to compare *La Maga y el*

Maestro and *Leonora's World* in terms of what essential elements and key aspects have been retained and carried over, many as signatures of Double Edge Theatre: the yellow proscenium curtains, the Giantess figure on stilts, the spiral corkscrew that enables flight, the glowing egg, some of the recipes and some of the lines. Johnson's Carrington appears in both, yet she improvises more in *Leonora's World*, given its looser structure that enables spontaneity. The selection of adapted Carrington artworks are slightly different in each production, although there are inevitable crossovers.

Boundary creatures

> the acrobat, the astronaut, and even the porn star ... had been able to escape their own bodies and, for a few moments, flee their condition and enter something more hypnotic.
>
> —Chloe Aridjis (2013)[31]

The logo for Double Edge Theatre has an archaeological backstory—the bacchanalian figure with the double-bladed axe, their original logo from the 1980s, has subsequently been streamlined, and, in recent years, has come to represent a winged woman.[32] This is apposite given that one of the company's signature performative practices is "flying," including trapeze acts, aerial choreography, and intricate stilt-work, much of which is derived from ensemble members' backgrounds in circus and puppet theatre.[33] Klein explains that she had "always wanted training to not only deal with the ground," and, like the logo, such gravity-defiance has evolved over time through a commitment by particular members of the company to aerial training.[34] Klein's directorial style has even been likened by one reviewer to that of a "ringmaster extraordinaire."[35] Such Icarian ambitions make Carrington's imaginary sites all the more appropriate given the number of airborne vehicles and winged creatures that inhabit her imaginative universe. Double Edge found this was particularly the case in their performance of the soaring figures that occur in her paintings *La chasse* (1942) and *Nine Nine Nine* (1948). Co-producer Cariel Klein astonished audiences in their rendition of the latter picture, their body twirling and undulating upside down, their spiral flight a conduit for the alternative realities on offer (Figure 32). Later, Travis Coe soared across the pond at night in a *deus ex machina* as if inhabiting the floating islands of Carrington's wartime painting, *La chasse*. Again, it is interesting that flying should be the preserve of the women and non-gender binary members of the ensemble. Serenity Young, who has written a cultural history of flying women, explains how acts of flying rail against "patriarchal definitions of womanhood" as a metaphor

for actively breaking restraints and taking control of one's destiny.[36] Writing further on the paradoxical figure of the aerialist, Helen Stoddart points out the simultaneity of the illusion and the reality of their body politics, highlighting this figure as a synecdoche for the whole cultural phenomena of circus:

> There is ... congruence between the presentation of the female aerialist's body and the image that the circus as a whole has presented itself ... the circus self-image is at heart a paradoxical one since it promotes an idea of itself in the popular imagination as embodying a lifestyle unfettered by conventionality or by social and legal restraint: a freedom which was echoed in performances which foregrounded the illusion of ease. Behind this image lie levels of physical discipline, bodily regulation and hardship which are unrivalled by any other western performance art.[37]

For the Double Edge ensemble, such commitment to physical discipline and dedication to circus techniques and training all contribute to making the theatrical spectacle appear seamless and effortless. On one level, it is illusion, on another, it is a lived reality that suspends disbelief. This is what makes productions like *La Maga y el Maestro* and *Leonora's World* such successful practical inquiries into surrealist techniques in the early twenty-first century. The figure of the aerialist also has much to tell us about Carrington the artist, and her ability to enable us to imagine the impossible.

Donna J. Haraway's notion of the "boundary creature" offers a useful way of defining how the winged beings and raw material of Carrington's imagination have been adapted so authentically into Double Edge Theatre's sense of flight.[38] The creatures that Haraway has in mind are anomalous cyborgs, mermaids, and women, "wild cards" that inhabit "possible [feminist] worlds," marginal beings that Haraway repositions at the heart of her "blasphemy."[39] While Haraway's biotechnologies might seem out of sync with Carrington's organic universe and Double Edge's farmland, Haraway maintains that "the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion."[40] Her emphasis on the repositioning of myth, hybridity, and "possible bodies" are therefore allied: "The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and [biotechnological] tool mutually constitute each other."[41] Such a statement may be closely aligned with Double Edge Theatre's Carrington cycle and might be pushed even further when it comes to Carrington's philosophical aftermath.

Elaborating on Haraway, Mary Russo and Frances S. Connelly further probe the compelling idea of the boundary creature as the very manifestation of the grotesque: "something that creates meaning by prying open a gap, pulling us into unfamiliar, contested terrain."[42] Connelly does this by

re-reading the grotesque through the architectural grotto, arabesque, carnivalesque, and caricature: "[the grotesque] is earthy and material, a cave, an open mouth that invites our descent into other worlds. It is a space where the monsters and marvels of our imagination are conceived … fusing humor with horror, wit with transgression, repulsion with desire."[43] This is true also for Russo who describes study of the grotesque as "claustrophobic," and "position[s] … the grotesque—as superficial and to the margins."[44] Although Carrington's work is not mentioned specifically in either study, both conclude that the grotesque is typically associated with "the attributes of the feminine."[45] Such languages of the feminine grotesque are germane when it comes to appreciating Carrington's underlying haunting of maximal theatrical spectacles and liminal trapeze work. Double Edge Theatre's flying figures present the physical manifestation of such edgework, not only parading Carrington's own boundary creatures but demonstrating Carrington *as* a boundary creature herself. Some of the most successful adaptations of Carrington are cognisant of this aspect of her legacy, the significance and political potency of prowling the fringes, as well as being acknowledged in the limelight.

In closing this chapter on flying beings, eco-farming, and theatrical adaptation, I would like to suggest that the grotesque boundary creature has become the very manifestation of Leonora Carrington for Double Edge Theatre and beyond, an embodiment of feminist intertextuality and mythological rewriting. Along this edge or line of inquiry, I find another Venn diagram linking many of the examples already touched on in this study, from the performative bodies of Tilda Swinton's *The Maybe* (1995) and Samantha Sweeting and Lynn Lu's *The Hearing Trumpet* (2011), to the trickster-like entity of Lucy Skaer's *Harlequin is as Harlequin Does* (2012), and to the ecological introverts in novels by Chloe Aridjis and Heidi Sopinka. In evoking Carrington as an epistemological framework, Double Edge's multifaceted production makes its audience reflect and seriously consider the possibilities of communal creative living, the benefits of existing in closer proximity to agriculture, and a proactive awareness of the native Nipmuc culture that have left their mark on this land. In total, Double Edge Theatre can be seen to interweave all aspects of adaptative gestures inherited from Carrington, from narrative costumes to esoteric conceptualism, from animal rights and intertextual dialogue to the importance of an eco-feminist creative solitude.

Notes

Double Edge Theatre's response to the global pandemic is noteworthy, having to cancel their spring 2020 tour half-way through. Double Edge Theatre opened for socially distanced tours, hosted Tai Chi classes, and presented their Summer Spectacle under the heading '6 Feet Apart, All Together' (2020) for limited audience numbers around 12 key locations across their 105-acre farmland. This spectacle continued their reference to Carrington with a scene entitled, 'Leonora's Labyrinth of Tarot.'

1 Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 2. Grateful thanks to Kim L. Pace for introducing me to this idea.
2 Stacy Klein cited in Richard Schechner, 'Double Edge Theatre in its Ashfield Community: An Interview with Stacy Klein,' *TDR/The Drama Review*, 64:4 (December 2020): 69. For more on Klein's history with Rena Mirecka, see 50.
3 Josh Appignanesi cited in Jennifer Higgie, 'How "Female Human Animal" Blends Documentary with Fiction,' Frieze (2018): https://frieze.com/article/how-female-human-animal-blends-documentary-fiction (Accessed 24 October 2019).
4 Chris Rohmann, 'Love Letter to a Nightmare,' *Valley Advocate* (4 February 2020): https://valleyadvocate.com/2020/02/04/love-letter-to-a-nightmare (Accessed 14 April 2020).
5 Interview with Stacy Klein.
6 Janet Lyon, 'Carrington's Sensorium,' *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, eds J. P. Eburne and C. McAra (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 164.
7 Frank Hentschker, 'In Conversation with Stacy Klein and and Stephanie Monseu,' *Segal Talks* (8 May 2020): https://youtube/SOzefa8J_Bc (Accessed 12 May 2020).
8 Susan L. Aberth, 'Programme Notes,' *Leonora: La Maga y el Maestro* (2018), 6. More recently, Klein has continued to remind audiences that Aberth was there from the beginning of their research into Carrington, 'Leonora Carrington and the Theatre: Susan L. Aberth and Stacy Klein In Conversation' (7 March 2021): www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJUTP82shOY (Accessed 28 March 2021).
9 For more on Carrington's theatrical interests, see Tara Plunkett, 'Dissecting *The Holy Oily Body*: Remedios Varo, Leonora Carrington and *El Santo Cuerpo Grasoso*,' *Leonora Carrington and the International Avant-Garde*, 74.
10 Andreas Lommels, *Masks: Their Meaning and Function* (London: Ferndale Editions, 1981), 7.
11 Natalya Lusty reads this mask in terms of class and "*faceless* wage labour," *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 34.
12 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 107.
13 Stewart, *On Longing*, 20.
14 Bill Marx, 'Best Stage Productions of 2019,' *The Arts Fuse* (28 December 2019): https://artsfuse.org/192651/theater-feature-best-stage-productions-of-2019 (Accessed 24 April 2020).
15 Jonathan P. Eburne, '"All Artwork Is a Magical Act,"' *ASAP/J* (10 October 2019): http://asapjournal.com/all-artwork-is-a-magical-act-an-interview-with-susan-aberth-and-stacy-klein-jennifer-johnson (Accessed 16 April 2020).
16 Tilda Swinton performs the same detail in her fashion story with Tim Walker for *i-D Magazine* (2017).

17 Carlos Uriona was interested in his native gauchos (horse-people or cowhands) when defining this role, personal correspondence with the author.
18 Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door* (New York: St Martin's Press, [1976] 1977), 21.
19 Thanks to Hannah Buckley for this notion.
20 Tere Arcq, 'In the Land of Convulsive Beauty: Mexico,' *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*, eds Ilene Susan Fort et al. (Los Angeles, CA and Mexico City: LACMA and Prestel, 2012), 81.
21 For more on this poster, which was originally a gouache painting, see Jonathan P. Eburne and Catriona McAra, '*Mujeres conciencia* (*Women's Awareness*): Leonora Carrington's Agit-prop,' Manchester University Press Blog (July 2019): https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/articles/mujeres-conciencia-womens-awareness-leonora-carringtons-agit-prop-by-catriona-mcara-and-jonathan-p-eburne (Accessed 12 July 2020).
22 Carrington, *The Stone Door*, 21.
23 Leonora Carrington cited in Alejandro Jodorowsky, *The Spiritual Journey of Alejandro Jodorowsky* (Rochester, NY: Park Street Press, 2005), 29.
24 Personal correspondence with the author.
25 Personal correspondence.
26 Alejandro Jodorowsky and Marianne Costa, *The Way of Tarot: The Spiritual Teacher in the Cards* (Rochester, NY: Destiny Books, 2009), 5–6.
27 Jodorowsky, *The Spiritual Journey*, 25.
28 Thanks to Carlos Uriona for confirming this.
29 Dawn Adès, 'Carrington's Mysteries,' *Leonora Carrington* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 100.
30 Jodorowsky, *The Spiritual Journey*, 25–26.
31 Chloe Aridjis, *Asunder* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), 120.
32 Double Edge Theatre, 'From Allston to Ashfield: Historical Highlights from 1982-Present,' *Medium* (24 April 2019): https://medium.com/@DoubleEdgeTheatre/from-allston-to-ashfield-historical-highlights-from-1982-present-931c35c0714d (Accessed 23 April 2020).
33 Co-producer, Carlos Uriona, founded the Argentinian puppet theatre Diablomundo, and Cariel Klein trained at the New England Center for Circus Arts, among other places.
34 Klein cited in Schechner, 'Double Edge Theatre,' 45.
35 Marx, 'Best Stage Productions of 2019.'
36 Serenity Young, *Women Who Fly: Goddesses, Witches, Mystics and Other Airborne Females* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5. Grateful thanks to Cariel Klein for suggesting this reference, which could be said to function as a sourcebook for their aerial practice.
37 Helen Stoddart, *Rings of Desire: Circus History and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 175.
38 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 2.
39 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 4.

40 Donna J. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 6.
41 Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 33.
42 Frances S. Connelly, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: The Image at Play* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8; 2; Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15. The notion of the "boundary creature" is adapted from Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, and further mentioned in Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 2.
43 Connelly, *The Grotesque*, 1.
44 Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 1; 5.
45 Connelly, *The Grotesque*, 2; 116–117; Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 1. Such arguments chime closely with Susan Rubin Suleiman's "feminist intertextuality," *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 173; 142.

distinctive and engaged feminism that probably also resonates with the struggles of many women* (artists) today.

4. **Would you describe your practice as feminist in any way? What does this word mean to you?**

Lynn Lu: Prior to becoming a mother in 2013, I did not actually identify as particularly female (due to Buddhist training) hence did not address gender in particular even though much of my work was autobiographical. Then because my experience of motherhood has been unusually harrowing, I made a series of works that specifically addressed the maternal. And in 2018, I made *Haumapuhia Rising*, which was my first consciously feminist work—made as the mother of a daughter.

To be a feminist in 2020 is to know that we stand on the shoulders of Mary Wollstonecraft, Emmeline Pankhurst, Sojourner Truth, Simone de Beauvoir, Rosa Parks, et al. And while we have come a long way (#MeToo, #TimesUp), equality has yet to be achieved: something abundantly clear in terms of how becoming a parent still generally all but decimates the mother's career while making not so much as a dent on the father's career. And here in Asia, mothers' careers are safeguarded by routinely farming out our children to women who are less privileged—who then are unable to adequately nurture their own children which perpetuates their poverty.

Katharina Ludwig: I couldn't imagine my practice without it being feminist, by which I mean that it is only feminist if it also critically interrogates gender, race, class, and privilege of any sort. If it is not immediately tied into action and practice the word means nothing to me, but if it does it means everything.

Theatre

1. **What is your creative practice, and can you explain how Leonora Carrington has become manifest within it?**

Stacy Klein: I founded Double Edge in 1982 based on the principle of the actor's autonomy in performance creation and a training practice which reflected the growth of the total actor. (Originally sourced in my mentor Rena Mirecka's Teatr Laboratorium plastics/physical, psycho physical, metaphor.) This practice is the basis of long-term ensemble work which now takes place at our farm centre in western Massachusetts and includes performance creation of both indoor performance and outdoor spectacle. The work meets visceral training, source work with image, large objects, vocal and instrumental music, metaphor, and text. In the cycles DE has created, visual artists are used both as source material and inspiration for story and design. This includes Bruno Schulz,

in the *Republic of Dreams*, part of the *Garden Cycle*; the *Chagall Cycle*, including *Shahrazad*, *Odyssey*, and the *Grand Parade* (all based on his paintings, with the *Grand Parade* also inspired by his long life throughout the twentieth century), and now the work of Carrington. Finding Leonora has been, for me, a meeting with a visual artist version of my own imagination, a mirror into my art and vision, a reflection, and a guide. Her way of seeing multiple realms and realities together in one world speaks to me in a singular way.

Eldarin Yeong: I am a theatre maker and cross-disciplinary artist. In 2017, I watched a documentary on Carrington. I was shocked to learn that her parents were instrumental in her imprisonment in Spain. It prompted me to research coercive control and honour-based violence, and I later made a performance art responding to it.

Alison Duddle: My work is typically made for performance, so as a director I weave together narratives with puppets, masks, and, more recently, animation. The materials I am repeatedly drawn to are clay, paper, and wood—but the scale and context of the work I am making often determines the materials used.

2. **What specifically about Carrington and/or her work interests you? Which of her artworks and/or writings are you particularly drawn to? When did you first become interested in her?**

Stacy Klein: *The Stone Door* is one of the most meaningful books I have ever read, bringing story into a Kabbalistic vision and undertaking of the spirit. I read three sentences at a time (just like I read the ZOHAR). The words "let me in" still resonate. *Down Below* is profound and honest in a way that I don't normally find, particularly as a woman. The transforming of rape and pain into art, without glamour and without burying is courageous. *The Hearing Trumpet* is wonderful in its characterisation of age, older women. I could go on … And about paintings, there are few that I don't find compelling at the very least. We have a joke that each time we look at Leonora's work (as we did just now in the MARCO Museum) we have new favourites. *Gibbet Birds*, *The House Opposite*, her Kabbalistic work, her sculptures, *Nunscape*, parts of *St Anthony* … Again the way in which animals come alive and dominate (as if we humans aren't always the centre of the universe), her melding of the spiritual with the ordinary, her sense of humour, the water, the fire, the ruins …

Eldarin Yeong: I first came across Carrington's work when I visited the Tate years ago. Her art and stories are very complementary to each other, both fantastical, childlike, and disturbing to the psyche. 'The Oval Lady' is my favourite. For me, her work is uniquely powerful, because not only she depicted extreme human conditions, she lived through them.

Alison Duddle: In addition to being inspired by the painting, I have returned repeatedly to the painting, *The Giantess*, to her sculpture, and to the short stories, which have a wonderful playfulness about them.

3. **Why is Carrington's legacy proving so productive a site for creative work today? She suddenly feels very relevant again. Why do you think this might be?**

Stacy Klein: I think that Leonora had access to many cultures, understood deeply both the pain and the amazement of women, saw war and massacre but at the same time saw the possibilities of the imagination and upheld the environment with the value it should have for all of us. In this she was a prophet (and we still don't listen to our prophets even as we bring to extinction so many species and perhaps the earth itself). She was spiritual and magical and yet she recognised the daily as necessary to the spirit. There is everything in her work. I cannot tell you how many women have said to me, after seeing *La Maga y el Maestro*, that they have never seen a woman mentoring a man on stage, or a woman creating magic, or a woman of her magnitude. Today my doctor's secretary, who saw the show a couple months ago (and who I thought did not like it) went on and on telling me she had gone out afterwards and researched all of Leonora's paintings and she couldn't believe it and that there needs to be more works about women!

Eldarin Yeong: Leonora was born at a time when women were largely expected to follow gender roles. She broke away from traditions, became a feminist and part of the male-dominated surrealist movement. Her achievement was and still is something quite revolutionary.

Alison Duddle: They are mysterious, beautiful, and refuse to explain themselves. Also, her lifetime-long practice throughout all stages of her life is inspirational.

4. **Would you describe your practice as feminist in any way? What does this word mean to you?**

Stacy Klein: YES. Double Edge was founded as a feminist theatre in 1982—a response to the times. I realised in 2016 that little had changed, and I was quite shocked for a while. But now it seems FUNDAMENTAL to everything that women start leading the world, before we don't have one left to lead.

Eldarin Yeong: I don't consider myself a feminist, but I aspire to be an activist. I think being a feminist nowadays is to acknowledge the diversity among women and to understand the complexity of gender equality that can be contributed by race, class, and other factors.

Alison Duddle: My work often explores female narratives or re-imagines the female role in traditional narratives. I would say that my work is informed by my feminist principles, rather than that my practice is feminist.

Animation

1. **What is your creative practice, and can you explain how Leonora Carrington has become manifest within it?**

Elizabeth Hobbs: I am an animated filmmaker, with a background in printmaking and artist's books. My films tend to be experimental in form and often inspired by real people or events. Previous subjects include the painter Oskar Kokoschka, the Serbian administrator Imperial Provisor Frombald, and the pilot Amy Johnson.

Eleanor Mulhearn: I work with diverse combinations of materials (particularly clay), to create figurative and animated projected works, often at miniature scale. These pieces draw on animation craft practices, in investigation of animation's pre-filmic making histories and mythological roots. Carrington's work includes examples of beguiling collisions of scale, from the sub-miniature to the gigantic, these worlds sitting together without any need for explanation. Her strange worlds free the viewer from the everyday, metaphorically evoking potential new relationships and new interpretations for coexisting in the world. I am interested in how collaborating with my fellow artists on this project, each of us working at widely differing scales and employing diverse skills, is evolving to produce new imaginary spaces, increasingly through animation, performance, storytelling, and sound.

2. **What specifically about Carrington and/or her work interests you? Which of her artworks and/or writings are you particularly drawn to? When did you first become interested in her?**

Elizabeth Hobbs: I read Carrington's short story 'The Debutante' in 2015 and approached the literary agent for the Estate for the rights to make an animation based on the story. I was happy to get permission to adapt the story and to be able to begin making the film in 2020 with the support of the BFI's Film Fund. All of her stories are extraordinary, but 'The Debutante' particularly resonates with my own life. Carrington's background isn't so different from my own; she and I both attended St Mary's Convent in Ascot and Chelsea School of Art. I also feel as if I escaped from the life that had been planned for me, so I particularly appreciate the wild, defiant way in which she chose to express her struggle for independence as a young woman.

Eleanor Mulhearn: I first encountered Leonora through finding her novel, *The Hearing Trumpet*, in a library—which led me to her short stories and diverse artworks. Her painting, *The House Opposite*, which