

WOMEN SURREALISTS

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Hannah Höch (1889–1978), *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany*, 1919-20, collage, 114 x 90 cm, Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

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- This talk is based on three recent exhibition—Dorothea Tanning's work at Tate Modern, a Dora Maar exhibition at Tate Modern and an exhibition on British Surrealism at the Dulwich Picture Gallery (all in 2019 and 2020).
- **I will be discussing the role of women artists in the Surrealist movement, an important and, until recently, a rarely discussed topic.**
- **Surrealism arose from a movement called Dada [CLICK] that was anti-beauty, anti-reason and anti-religion. For example, this work by Hannah Höch, the German Dada artist who invented photomontage, symbolises her cutting through the patriarchal society.**
- **But why was Dada anti-everything? The Dadaists believed that it was the social conventions that had led to the horrors of World War I. They therefore thought**

that the only way to avoid another war was to overthrow all such conventions.

- **After the war, many of the artists who had participated in the Dada movement began to work in a surrealist mode, influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud and the importance of dreams and the unconscious, but it wasn't until 1924 that Surrealism was officially inaugurated when the writer André Breton published his 'Manifesto of Surrealism'.**
- From the beginning Surrealism was seen to be revolutionary and it was hoped it would bring about profound changes in society by utilising the power of dreams. André Breton wrote that the aim of Surrealism was to "resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality", or surreality.
- It rejected thought based on pure reason and called for the power of myth and dreams to inspire our thoughts. It was motivated by the writing of Sigmund Freud and it thought our childhood was the most complete and fertile period of our lives from which we have all gone astray.
- **One often hears about artists such as André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst and Renee Magritte but the role of women artists is barely mentioned. Hannah Höch put it well, she said the Dadaists were hypocrites. They criticised the way society treated women but refused to recognise the same faults in themselves.**

NOTES

- The term 'surrealism' was first used by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) in 1917 in the program notes for Sergei

Diaghilev's Ballets Russes *Parade*.

- In 1916, German author and poet Hugo Ball founded Cabaret Voltaire – the Zürich-based nightclub where Dada was officially established. Zürich was the perfect environment in which to preach creative anarchy
- Hannah Höch involvement with the Berlin Dadaists began in Ernest in 1917.

WOMEN "SURREALISTS"

- ✦ [Leonora Carrington \(1917-2011\)](#)
- ✦ Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)
- ✦ Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012)
- ✦ Lee Miller (1907-1977)
- ✦ Dora Maar (1907-1997)
- ✦ Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010)



- The reason I have put "Surrealists" in inverted commas is that the majority of women artists associated with Surrealism did not identify with it — they were not interested in unleashing the unconscious mind but were driven by much more personal and political aims. Frida Kahlo said “I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality”. Many women have been associated with Surrealism but the movement's leaders were male chauvinists who saw women at best as an inspiring muses. André Breton, for example called Kahlo “a young woman endowed with all the gifts of seduction, one accustomed to the company of men of genius.”
- So, let me try to correct that. I have selected just six women from the many available so apologies if I have missed out your favourite artists. Let me try to deal with each woman in her own terms:
 - Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) was British but spent most of her life in Mexico City. She has been called one of the last surviving members of the Surrealist movement but she was also a founding member of the women's liberation movement in

Mexico.

- **Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) despised being called a Surrealist and she became a well-known Mexican artist in her own right, known for her brutally honest self-portraits and her folk art style.**
- **Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012) was an American painter, printmaker, sculptor, writer, and poet who discovered Surrealism at the 1936 exhibition in New York and was for a while inspired by its dreamlike themes.**
- **Lee Miller (1907-1977) was a force in her own right, went from fashion model to fashion photographer, to war correspondent and finally to gourmet cook.**
- **Dora Maar (1907-1997) was a French photographer, painter, and poet who is unfortunately often discussed only in terms of her sexual liaison with Pablo Picasso.**
- **Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) was a French-American artist known for her large-scale sculptures and installations. Her work has much in common with Surrealism but she never associated herself with the movement.**
- **For each of the six artists I will present a small exhibition of their work. I will begin with a brief biography and then talk about three or four of their best known works.**

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- **To better understand the macho Surrealist culture and why women were removed from history Leonora Carrington is a good place to start.**



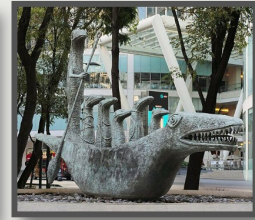
Leonora Carrington
1939, 22 years old



Self-Portrait (Inn of the
Dawn Horse)
c. 1937



The Old Maids
1947



Crocodilo
2000

LEONORA CARRINGTON (1917-2011)

- This is Leonora Carrington on the left just before World War II. A few years before she had fallen in love with the well-known Surrealist artist Max Ernst who was 26 years older than her. They lived an idyllic life in the French countryside until World War II started and Ernst, who was a German Jew, was interned by the French as an "undesirable alien". Carrington sold the house and left for Spain, had a nervous breakdown on the way and was taken to an insane asylum.
- This made her the perfect example of how the Surrealists saw women—beautiful models and muses who were subject to bouts of hysteria and insanity. She was described as "passive, powerless, and at the mercy of the unconscious."
- However, Carrington rejected all these labels. As she put it later, "I didn't have time to be anyone's muse ... I was too busy rebelling against my family and learning to be an artist."
- So let's start at the beginning, why was she rebelling against her family...

NOTES

BIO:CARRINGTON

- **Leonora Carrington** (6 April 1917 – 25 May 2011) was a British-born Mexican artist, surrealist painter, and novelist. She lived most of her adult life in Mexico City and was one of the last surviving participants in the Surrealist movement of the 1930s. Carrington was also a founding member of the Women's Liberation Movement in Mexico during the 1970s.
- She was born into a wealthy family in Lancashire. She had three brothers, was educated privately and was expelled from two schools for rebellious behaviour. Her father opposed a career in art but her mother approved. She was presented at court but she claims she took a book to read instead. She attended Chelsea School of Art for a year. She learnt about Surrealism from Herbert Read's book *Surrealism*. She was encouraged early on by the Surrealist artist Edward James who bought many of her paintings. In 1936, when she was 19, she met German Surrealist **Max Ernst** (1891-1976) and the following year he left his wife and they started living together. He was 45 and had been married twice and was still married to his second wife. He was later to marry Peggy Guggenheim (m. 1942-1946) and Dorothea Tanning (m. 1946-1976).
- At the outbreak of WWII he was living with Carrington but was interned as an "undesirable foreigner". She did not know if he would ever return so she sold the house and left for Spain. Meanwhile thanks to his influential friends he was released a few weeks later. After the German occupation he was arrested by the Gestapo but managed to escape and flee to America with the help of Peggy Guggenheim who he married the following year in New York.

- Meanwhile, Carrington stayed with friends in Madrid but had a mental breakdown and was admitted to an asylum where she received convulsive therapy and powerful drugs. She was told her parents were transferring her to an asylum in South Africa but en route, in Portugal, she escaped. She went to the Mexican Embassy as the ambassador was a friend of Pablo Picasso. They agreed to a marriage of convenience so she could travel to Mexico as a diplomat's wife. They first spent a year in New York but she never renewed her relationship with Ernst.

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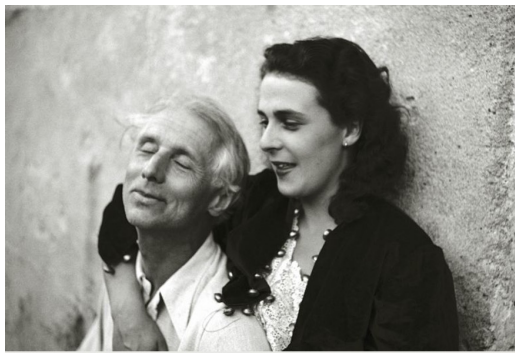
Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), *Crookhey Hall*, 1987. Colour lithograph, 43.5 x 76.5 cm

Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), *Crookhey Hall*, 1987. Colour lithograph, 43.5 x 76.5 cm

- She was born into a wealthy family in 1917 and spent her childhood here at Crookhey Hall, a country house in Lancashire set in 17 acres of garden and woodland. She described her father, a textile manufacturer, as a 'mafioso'. She was always a rebel and was expelled from two schools but when she finished school her parents forced her to come out as a debutante at Buckingham Palace, which she hated. In a surreal short story she described how she sent a hyena along to take her place at her coming-out ball at the Ritz.
- The hall was allegedly haunted and her mother would tell her ghost stories. When she was 19 her mother gave her a copy of Herbert Read's book *Surrealism* which was published to coincide with the International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936. Carrington was still at art school and visited the show and became particularly excited by the work of Max Ernst. Through friends she arranged to meet him at the Highgate home of a mutual friend (the architect

Ernö (pronounced 'airner') Goldfinger).

- **According to her cousin they fell in love "From the second they set eyes on one another"...**



Max Ernst and Leonora Carrington, Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche, France, by Lee Miller, 1939 |© Lee Miller Archives



Max Ernst and Leonora Carrington, Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche, France, by Lee Miller, 1939 |© Lee Miller Archives, England 2019

Postcard of carnival in Lisbon, 1938

Newspaper clipping Lisbon, 1938

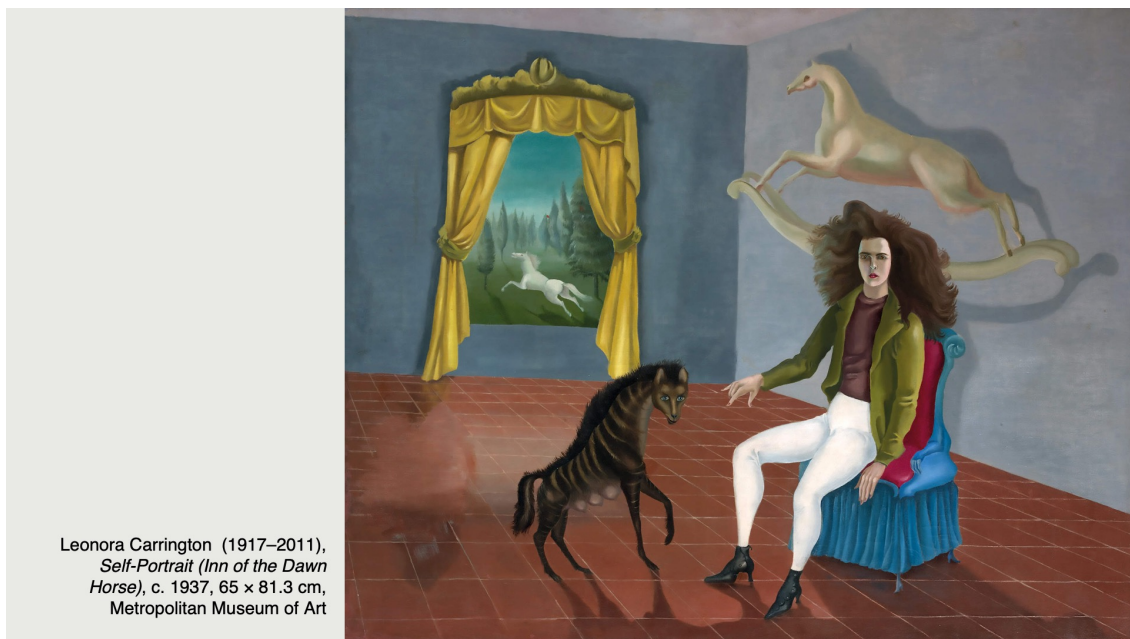
- The following year they started living together in Paris. Ernst was married and still spending time with his wife. He was 45 and had been married twice before. He was later to marry Peggy Guggenheim (m. 1942-1946), the wealthy American art collector and bohemian socialite, and then Dorothea Tanning (m. 1946-1976) who we will hear more about later.
- She met Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, Man Ray and Joan Miró. She wasn't daunted by any of them. One day for example, Miró gave her some money and asked her go and buy him some cigarettes. She later said, "if he wanted cigarettes, he could bloody well get them himself".
- In 1938 Ernst broke with his wife and they moved to

Provence where Lee Miller who we will hear more about later was a frequent visitor. At the outbreak of WWII Ernst, who was German, was interned as an "undesirable foreigner" but thanks to his influential friends he was released a few weeks later. Nine months later Germany occupied France and he was arrested by the Gestapo as a 'degenerate' artist. She was devastated as she did not know if he would ever return so she sold the house and fled to Madrid with a woman friend. Ernst managed to escape and flee to America with the help of Peggy Guggenheim.

- Meanwhile, Carrington stayed with friends in Madrid but had a mental breakdown and was admitted to an asylum where she received convulsive therapy and powerful drugs. Trapped in the asylum, she suffered unbearable pain from the Cardiozal injections which were given to induce seizures. She was strapped to her bed naked and lay in her own excrement. There was nothing glorifying about her condition. She wrote about it later in an honest biography called *Down Below*, "It was very much like having been dead," she said.
- She was told her parents were transferring her to an asylum in South Africa but en route, in Lisbon (CLICK), she managed to slip out of the back door of a cafe where she stopped with her father's minders. She said to the taxi driver the first thing that came into her head, "Take me to the Mexican Embassy". She knew the ambassador was a friend of Pablo Picasso and surprisingly, the ambassador agreed to a marriage of convenience so she could travel to Mexico as a diplomat's wife.
- By the way, why Lisbon? During WWII Portugal was neutral and became the hub for refugees fleeing the war.

(CLICK) Because of the film *Casablanca* in French-controlled Morocco we think of that city as the centre for fleeing refugees but Lisbon was the centre. One book described the scene at Lisbon's airport with its smugglers, spies and refugees as *Casablanca* magnified "twentyfold".

- To give you some idea of the turmoil, while she waited in Lisbon Max Ernst arrived with Peggy Guggenheim who had fallen madly in love with him, her ex-husband, his ex-wife and a collection of children. Leonora, a master of understatement, described it as 'very weird'. She never got together again with Ernst.**
- Carrington and her Mexican husband first went to New York where they dissolved the marriage and she moved to Mexico.**



Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), *Self-Portrait (Inn of the Dawn Horse)*, c. 1937, 65 × 81.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

- Going back a few years, this is her first Surrealist work that she produced after seeing the Surrealist exhibition in 1936. She had just fallen in love with Max Ernst but the war hadn't yet started.
- She is perched on the edge of a chair with a tailless, white rocking horse behind her and a female hyena in front of her. Out of the door we can see a galloping white horse running away through the trees.
- Horses frequently appear in her work and she said they symbolised her animal self and freedom and liberty. She was interested in Celtic mythology and the goddess Epona appears before her followers as a white horse. The rocking horse is probably a reference to a young girl who is in love with her rocking horse in a play she wrote called *Pénélope*.
- Hyenas were another frequent reference. In an interview

in 1999 she said, "I'm like a hyena, I get into the garbage cans. I have an insatiable curiosity." She also wrote a story called *The Debutante* (1937–38), in which a young girl is saved from her social obligations by a hyena which kills a housemaid and rips off her face to wear as a disguise—the story I mentioned earlier about her sending a hyena to represent her at her coming-out ball.

- The male Surrealists produced images that look a lot like Carrington's but in many cases they are based on fanciful, free associations. Hers are based on her personal associations and Celtic legends that her Irish mother told her.



Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), *The Old Maids*, 1947, 58.2 × 73.8 cm, Sainsbury Collection

- This is much later, after the war when she lived in Mexico. Carrington loved Mexico and its associations with mysticism and sorcery and she spent the rest of her life there, on and off. She divorced the Mexican ambassador and married a photographer and they had two sons.
- In this painting three well dressed women are drinking tea and eating cake while a fourth small woman or a child dressed in black drinks tea. A maid brings in a pie and a sixth woman is leaving for the garden followed by a black cat. Five birds are eating and one is stealing some cake from the table. A monkey hides behind the edge of the table.
- Carrington felt liberated by domesticity and motherhood and we often find a domestic setting in her work. She also liked practical jokes, Surrealist games and raucous story telling late into the night. She equated the feminine

domestic sphere with ancient magical practices and she believed women could invoke magic powers through ancient rituals and witchcraft. She would cook what she called magic potions and she studied alchemy, magic, the Taro and astrology and these ideas informed her work.

- She has declined to answer any questions about this painting only volunteering that she painted while she was pregnant.**

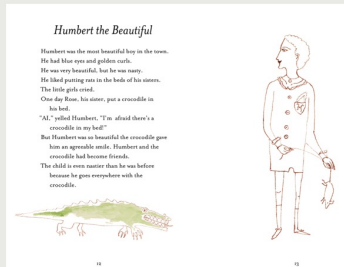
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Leonora Carrington (1917–2011),
How Doth the Little Crocodile



Two Pages from *The Milk of Dreams*

Leonora Carrington, *Cocodilo*,
2000, Mexico City



Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), *Cocodilo*, 2000, Mexico City
Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), *How Doth the Little Crocodile*, painting used by Google as their doodle to celebrate the 98th birthday of Leonora Carrington on 6 April 2015.

- Carrington lived to 93 and she produced this work when she was 83. The bronze sculpture is eight metres long and weighs five tons. It shows a crocodile boat being punted by a crocodile and containing five small crocodiles.
- She wrote many stories including children's stories. In one a beautiful but cruel boy puts rats in his sister bed so she retaliates by putting a crocodile in his bed but he is so beautiful the crocodile just smiles and they become friends. It finishes "The child is even nastier than he was before because he goes everywhere with the crocodile".
- It is also a reference to a poem by Lewis Carroll called *How Doth the Little Crocodile* from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), a story Carrington loved:
How doth the little crocodile

*Improve his shining tail
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!*

*How cheerfully he seems to grin
How neatly spreads his claws,
And welcomes little fishes in
With gently smiling jaws!*

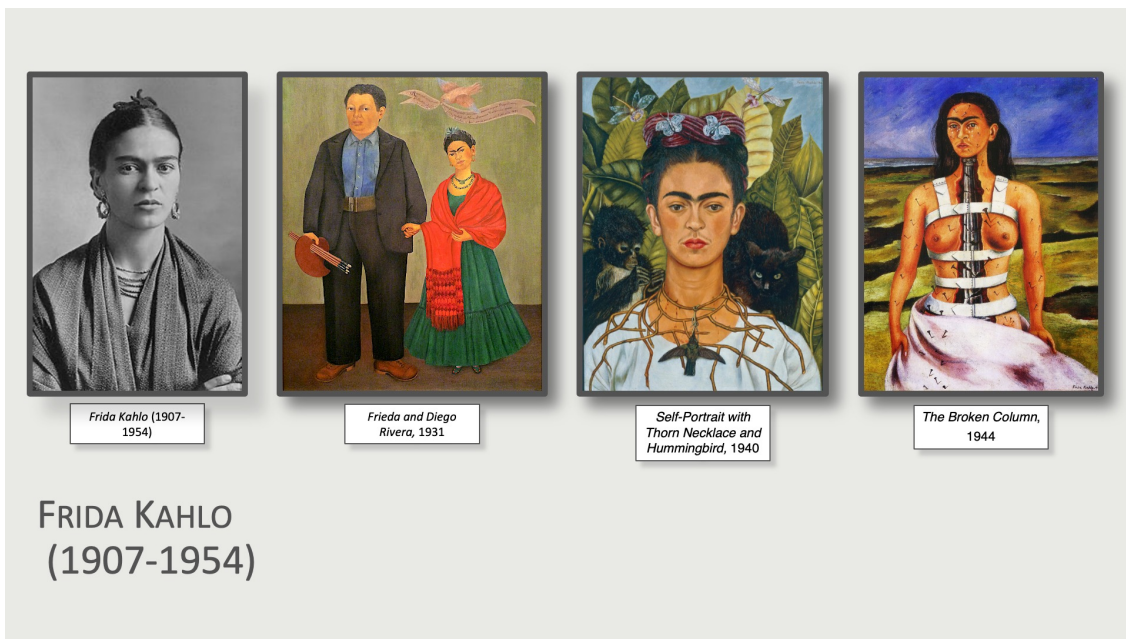
- Carrington wrote, “I think animals have everything — maybe a bit more than we have, but I believe that human beings are animals”.
- **My next artist, Frida Kahlo also lived in Mexico City so you might wonder if they knew each other. Carrington did befriend other women artists and she had a passing relationship with Frida Kahlo and attended her second wedding to Diego Rivera. However, Kahlo called the women who had settled in Mexico "those European bitches" and she thought them over intellectual. Mexico was a macho society but foreign women had a privileged status and there were far fewer expectations than of a Mexican woman such as Kahlo, so let's find out more about her ...**

NOTES

The Lewis Carroll poem is a parody of a 1715 poem by Isaac Watts called *Against Idleness and Mischief* which begins "How doth the little busy bee ...". Alice tries to recite the poem and turns the virtues into deception and predation.



Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) used her body and her physical pain to explore loss, death and self-identity.



Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), 1932, aged 25, photograph by her father

- One of Kahlo's earliest champions was André Breton who claimed her as a Surrealist who had developed the same ideas in total ignorance of their movement. Although she took part in Surrealist exhibitions, she said she "detest[ed] Surrealism" as it was a "bourgeois art" and not a "true art that the people hope from the artist".
- Some art historians consider her a symbolist who is more concerned in portraying her inner experiences. Another historian argues that as Kahlo's work was a mixture of fantasy and reality (and she drew heavily on Aztec mythology and Mexican culture) her paintings have more in common with magical realism which also combined reality and fantasy and like Kahlo used clearly outlined characters and bright colours.
- Her work remained largely unknown until the late 1970s when it was rediscovered by art historians and political activists. Her work is now known internationally for its

portrayal of Mexican traditions and for her uncompromising depiction of the female experience.

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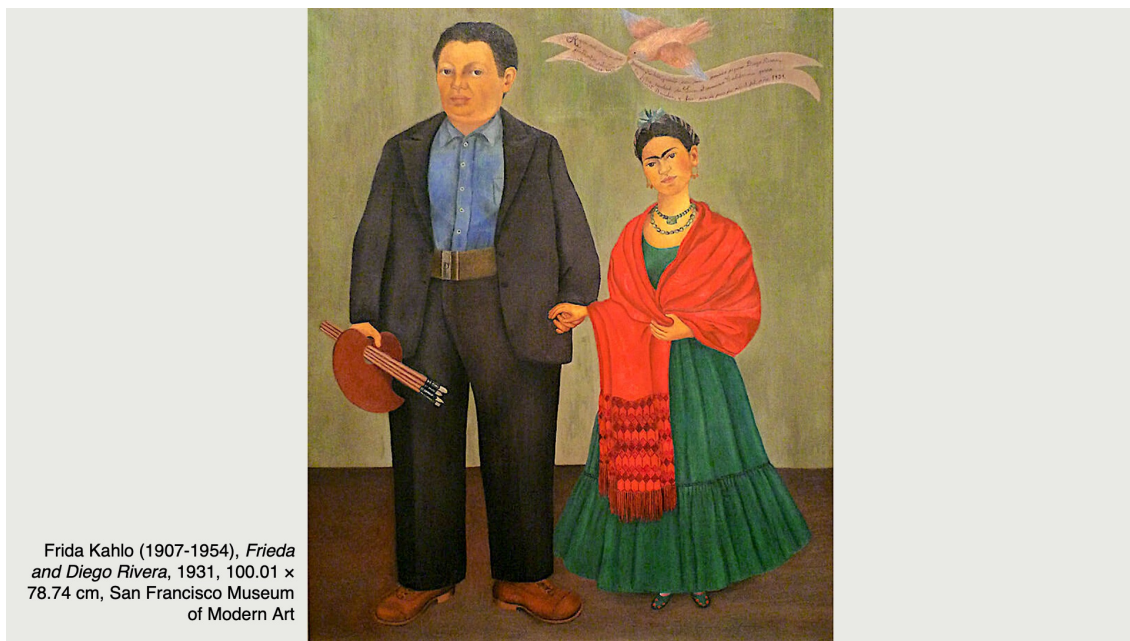
BIO:KAHLO

- Frida Kahlo (1907-1954, aged 47) was born in Coyoacán, near Mexico City to a German father with a Hungarian ancestry and a mother of mixed Spanish and native American heritage. She had polio when she was six and one leg was shorter than the other for which she got teased at school.
- She was interested in art but did not consider it as a career until in 1925 a terrible bus accident left her unable to walk for three months. She started painting in bed using a mirror to paint self-portraits.
- In 1928 she met Diego Rivera and asked his opinion of her work. He was impressed by the honesty and energy of her work and they began a relationship. He was twenty years older and had two common-law wives. They married the following year although his parents opposed the marriage describing it as a 'marriage between an elephant and a dove'. However, her father agreed as Rivera was wealthy and Kahlo required expensive medical treatment.
- In the period following the Mexican Revolution (1910-20) many Mexican women artists and intellectuals started to adopt traditional Mexican peasant clothing. Kahlo wore long colourful skirts partly to hide her withered leg, elaborate headrests and a lot of jewellery. Kahlo and Rivera moved to San Francisco in 1930 and it was a productive period for her art but she still presented herself as the wife of Rivera rather than an artist in her own right. They moved to Detroit where

she experienced numerous health problems relating to a failed pregnancy. The *Detroit News* published an article titled "Wife of the Master Mural Painter Gleefully Dabbles in Works of Art".

- On returning to Mexico City in 1934 she did not paint for two years but following her divorce and reconciliation she was extremely productive and some of her work was exhibited in 1938. She sold her first four works and the French Surrealist André Breton saw her work and described it as 'a ribbon around a bomb'. He arranged for her work to be exhibited in Paris and New York.
- She visited the exhibition in New York and her bright ethnic clothes caused a sensation but the press were condescending in their praise of 'Little Frida's pictures'. Despite the Great Depression she sold half her pictures. In New York she painted little but enjoyed the city and had several affairs.
- In 1939 she sailed to Paris but Breton no longer had a studio and her paintings were in customs. She arranged an alternative gallery but it would only show two of her paintings as it considered the others too shocking. The exhibition was not successful because of the looming world war. She was warmly received by artists such as Pablo Picasso but she was not impressed describing the Surrealists as 'very stupid', and "so crazy 'intellectual' and rotten that I can't even stand them anymore".
- In the 1940s she continued to be exhibited in the US and Mexico. In 1941 the stress of her father's death made her health problems worse. In 1943 she began to teach at the National School of Painting but health problems prevented her from travelling to Mexico City. Four of her enthusiastic pupils began to be called 'Los Fridos'.

- She struggled to make a living until the mid-40s as she would not compromise and upset some patrons and lost some commissions. But from the mid-40s onwards she was financially successful, 'featured in the majority of group exhibitions in Mexico' and could sell whatever she was painting straight from the easel.
- Her medical condition deteriorated and an operation on her spine failed. She struggled with her painting 'Mainly because I want to make it useful to the revolutionary communist movement... until now I have managed simply an honest expression of my own self'.
- She was transported to her last exhibition in Mexico City in 1953 in an ambulance and spent the opening ceremony and party in a four poster bed.
- She was operated on more than 30 times during her life. Part of her leg was amputated months before she died in 1954.



Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), *Frieda and Diego Rivera*, 1931, 100.01 x 78.74 cm, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

- Kahlo enjoyed painting and drawing from an early age and received instruction on printmaking from a family friend. When she was 18 she was involved in a terrible bus accident that damaged her pelvis and left her in lifelong pain. She was in bed for three months and this was when she started to paint seriously.
- Her interest in politics led to joining the Mexican Communist Party in 1927 where she met the then famous artist Diego Rivera (1886-1957). They started a passionate affair and he divorced his second wife and they married. Kahlo painted this wedding portrait two years into their marriage. The dove is holding a banner which says, "Here you see us, me Frieda Kahlo, with my dearest husband Diego Rivera. I painted these pictures in the delightful city of San Francisco, California for our companion Mr. Albert Bender, and it was in the month of April of the year 1931." (Bender, a Rivera supporter, had secured consent for Rivera to enter the United States after he was declined a visa

due to his well-known Communism.)

- **The stiff poses mirror the style of naive nineteenth-century Mexican painters. It shows Diego Rivera as solid as an oak, a maestro genius supported by his adoring wife. She understood he belonged to no one and even while she was painting this portrait he was having an affair with the tennis champion Helen Wills. Kahlo said, "Being the wife of Diego is the most marvellous thing in the world ... I let him play matrimony with other women. Diego is not anybody's husband and never will be, but he is a great comrade."**

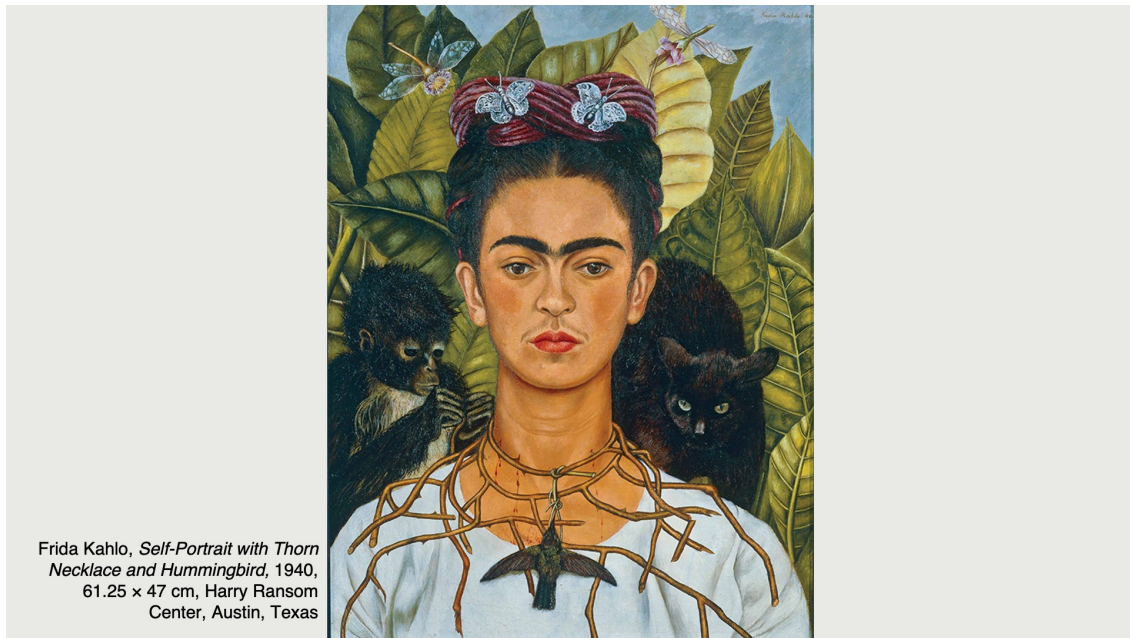
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Diego Rivera (1886-1957) was a famous Mexican artist who helped establish mural art in Mexico and internationally.

Rivera had numerous marriages and children, including at least one natural daughter. His first child and only son died at the age of two. He was still married when he met art student Frida Kahlo in Mexico. They began a passionate affair and, after he divorced his second wife Marin, Rivera married Kahlo on August 21, 1929. He was 42 and she was 22. Their mutual infidelities and his violent temper resulted in divorce in 1939, but they remarried December 8, 1940, in San Francisco, California. A year after Kahlo's death, on July 29, 1955, Rivera married Emma Hurtado, his agent since 1946. As of 2018, Rivera holds the record for highest price at auction for a work by a Latin American artist. His 1931 painting *The Rivals* sold for nearly \$10 million.

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Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, 1940, 61.25 x 47 cm, Harry Ransom Center, Austin, Texas

- Kahlo moved to Detroit with Rivera but experienced numerous health problems and produced only a few works in the early 1930s. She had an affair and they divorced and she was extremely productive and painted more than she had done the previous eight years. Later they reconciled their differences and remarried.
- Kahlo painted this shortly after her divorce and the end of her affair with photographer Nickolas Muray. He bought the painting and donated it to the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas.
- A thorn necklace strangles her throat as she stares defiantly out of the picture. A small black hummingbird hangs like pendant. The leaves and butterflies create a lush tropical backdrop. A small monkey on her right shoulder tugs at the thorn necklace. A black cat looks out from the foliage behind her left shoulder.

- **She closely identified with traditional Mexican folk art and fought against male rule and colonialism. The dead hummingbird is considered a good luck charm for love or represents Huitzilopochtli (pronounced 'wit-see-la-pot-tee'), the Aztec god of war. A black panther means bad luck and death and the monkey evil. The jungle behind her represents fertility.**
- **Rivera gave Kahlo a spider monkey as a gift, so it could represent him and the pain he caused represented by thorns. The thorns could also refer to Christ's crown of thorns symbolic of the pain she felt after her failed romantic relationships. In this Christian imagery the butterflies and dragonflies could symbolise her spiritual rebirth following her break with Rivera and Muray.**

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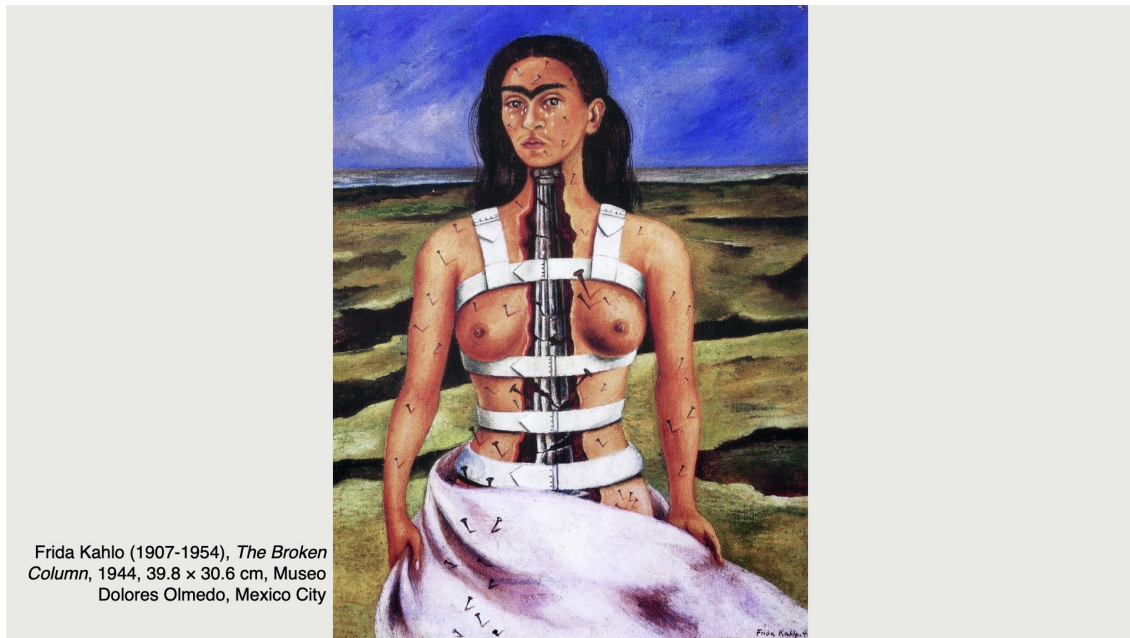
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Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), *The Broken Column*, 1944, 39.8 x 30.6 cm, Museo Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City

- As I said, Kahlo spent most of her life in pain after the bus accident. She had about thirty-five operations to try to fix her body but they all failed and she spent many years bedridden and could not have children although she had a number of miscarriages.
- In this painting nails pierce her body. Her chest and abdomen are split open revealing her spine as a broken column. A corset appears to be the only thing holding her body together. At this time she wrote on the back of another painting "Not the least hope remains to me."
- Surgeons tried to rebuild her spine in 1946 but the operation failed. The pain continued whether she stood, sat or lay down and she became addicted to alcohol and painkillers. Kahlo is one of the few people able to portray constant and intense pain and she has become a martyr for those plagued by chronic pain.
- She struggled to make a living from art until the mid to

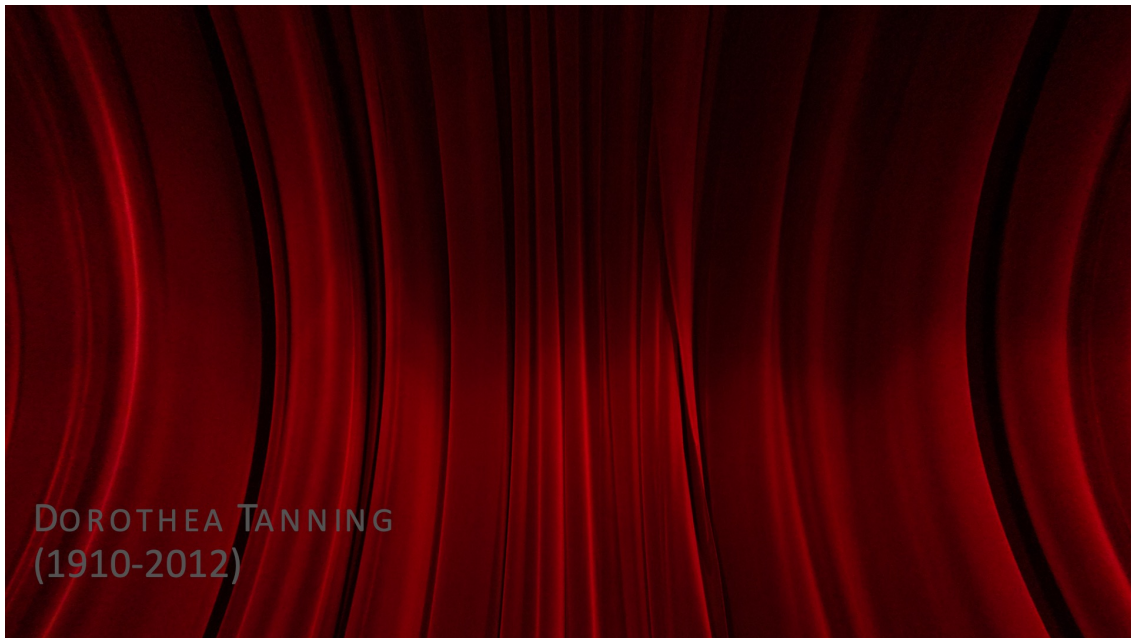
late 1940s partly because she refused to change her style for clients including the Mexican government. She had her first solo exhibition in 1953, one year before her death and was carried from an ambulance in a stretcher to the opening of the exhibition. The exhibition received positive publicity around the world and the same year the Tate exhibited five of her works in an exhibition on Mexican art. Just was just becoming known internationally when she died aged 47.

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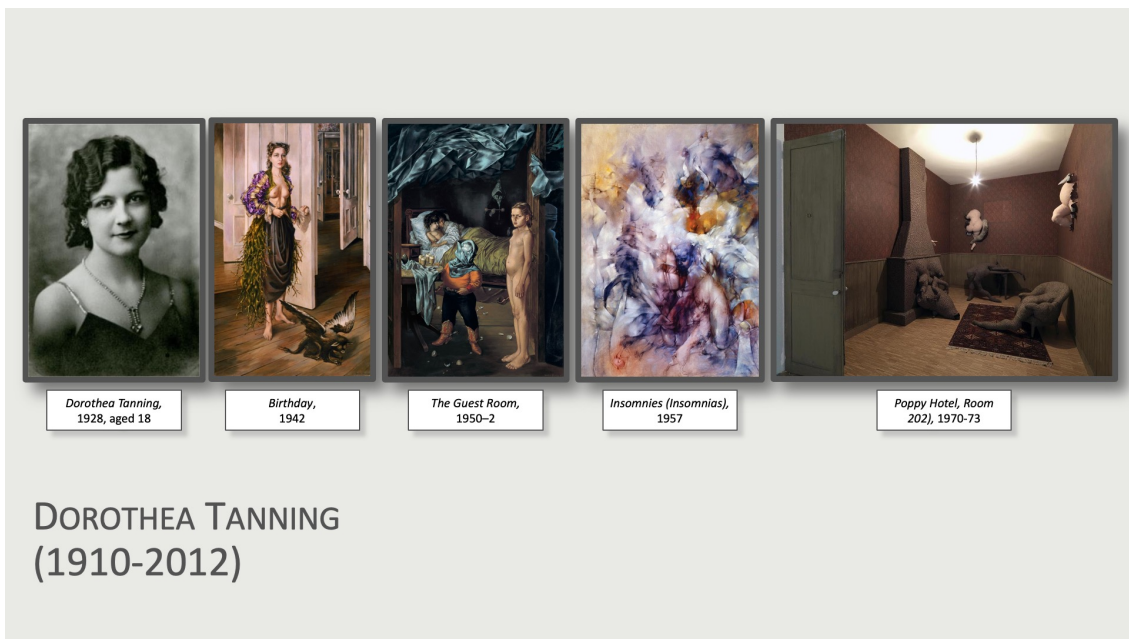
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DOROTHEA TANNING
(1910-2012)

My next artist is Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012). She was born during a storm and became an unstoppable life force exploring an enormous range of artistic styles and activities.



Photograph, Dorothea Tanning, 1928, aged 18

- Dorothea Tanning was born to devoutly religious parents in a small town in Illinois. She later wrote "nothing happened but the wallpaper". Her parents were shocked by her bohemian ways and her painting of a nude when she was 15. This is a photograph of Tanning when she was 18 and just starting at Knox College, a nearby liberal arts college.
- She moved to Chicago to study at the Academy of Fine Arts but only spent three weeks there, the only formal art training she had. Instead she worked as a waitress and spent all the time she could at the The Chicago Art Institute studying the paintings. She had her first exhibition in 1934 when she was 24.
- She moved to New York the following year and supported herself as a commercial artist, model and gangster's girlfriend. She said he was murdered while she was waiting for him at a bar.
- The following year she attended an exhibition on Dada

and Surrealism and was introduced to Surrealist artists who had fled Europe. In 1942 she met Max Ernst and within a week he had moved in with Tanning. You are thinking, but hadn't he just left Leonora Carrington and married Peggy Guggenheim? Yes, that's correct they had married the year before but don't worry about her too much, it is said that while in Europe she had slept with "over 1,000 men".

BIO:TANNING

Dorothea Margaret Tanning (August 25, 1910 – January 31, 2012, **aged 101**)

1910 born and raised in Galesburg, Illinois (pop. 32,000) to Lutheran Swedish immigrants. Had two sisters. She cried reading poetry when she was five and thought she would become an actress but by seven she decided she wanted to be an artist. She attended public school skipped two grades at high school and so was weak on arithmetic. Aged 15 her parents were horrified by their bohemian daughter and her painting of a nude. She attended Knox College (1928-30).

1930 (20) she moved to Chicago and spent three weeks at the Chicago Academy of Fine Art, the only formal training she had.

1935 (25) she moved to New York, supported herself as a commercial artist, model and gangster's girlfriend (she said he was murdered while she waited for him at the bar).

1936 the exhibition, *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* was a major influence on her work. After an eight-year relationship, she was married briefly to the writer Homer Shannon in 1941. She was introduced to the Surrealists who had fled Europe.

1942 (32) she painted *Children's Games*, two girls ripping off the wallpaper in a shadowy corridor to reveal fleshy

protrusions beneath. In her autobiography, Tanning wrote later that during her adolescence in Galesburg “nothing happened but the wallpaper”. She first met Max Ernst. He came to evaluate her work for an exhibition called 30 Women, part of Art of this Century held by his wife Peggy Guggenheim. Ernst persuaded her to make it 31 Women. Within a week he had moved in with Tanning. Guggenheim said she wished she had kept it as 30 Women. He was enchanted by (and named) her self-portrait *Birthday* (1942). They played chess fell in love and spent the rest of their lives together first in New York, then Sedona, Arizona then in France. In Sedona they built a house and hosted many friends including Henri Cartier-Bresson, Lee Miller, Roland Penrose, Yves Tanguy, Truman Capote (novelist), George Balanchine, and Dylan Thomas.

1943 (33) she published her first short story. She published six books (two memoirs and two collections of poems). She was included in Peggy Guggenheim's show Exhibition by 31 Women at the Art of This Century gallery in New York. Painted 1943 *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.

1944 (34) first solo exhibition thanks to Macy's art director. The surreal images of the 1940s labelled her as a Surrealist despite an individual style that developed over 60 years. She became a friend of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage; designed sets and costumes for several of George Balanchine's ballets and appeared in two of Hans Richter's avant-garde films.

1946 (36) Tanning married Ernst and they were married for 30 years until his death. Her career was overshadowed by his always known as Ernst's wife although her always called her Dorothea Tanning. They never discussed art. She disliked being labelled ('like a concentration camp tattoo') as a Surrealist. Moved to Sedona, Arizona and her work returned to

the erotic fantasies of her adolescence. Over the next ten years she painted of girlhood as a time of dangerous appetites and erotic power. Many of her paintings of this period are Daliesque but in the late 40s there are elements of Picasso and Ernst.

1949 (39) Tanning and Ernst relocated to France (Paris, Touraine and later Provence until Ernst's death in 1976 when she returned to Paris). She published a story called *Abyss* in which a guest at a mansion in the desert meets his host's seven-year old daughter in a room filled to bursting with bric-a-brac. She tell him to eat her dinner and she will show him her memory box. He does and "His gaze devoured the little red mouth, the throat, the hair, the white dress, as his mouth had devoured the plateful of food". The memory box is full of real eyes given to her by a friendly lion. He declares his loyalty and love to the girl.

1950 (40) *The Guest Room* (1950-2) makes difficult viewing when we know that the model for the naked pubescent girl who scowls at us did not want to pose naked and Tanning painted in her imagined breasts later.

1955 (45) her work radically changed, and her images became increasingly abstract, fragmented and prismatic, see *Insomnias* (1957). She called them her 'prism' paintings. Described as the 'Sistine Chapel painted over by Francis Bacon'. She wrote, "I wanted to lead the eye into spaces that hid, revealed, transformed all at once and where there would be some never-before-seen image, as if it had appeared with no help from me". As she explains, "Around 1955 my canvases literally splintered... I broke the mirror, you might say."

1957 moved to a house she designed in Provence in order to escape McCarthyism.

1960s (50s) her work became abstracted although suggestive of the female form.

1969 to 1973 (60s), Tanning concentrated on a body of three-dimensional work, soft, fabric sculptures. *Nue Couchée* ('Recumbent Nude', 1969-70, Tate) is like an intimate version of a Henry Moore sculpture. The high point is *Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202* ('Poppy Hotel, Room 202', 1970-73, Pompidou). Tanning believes the work relates to a song popular in her childhood which laments the fate of Kitty Kane a Chicago gangster's wife who poisoned herself in room 202. The words Tanning remembers are "In room two hundred and two I The walls keep talkin' to you I I'll never tell you what they said I So turn out the light and come to bed." Her soft fabric works are the earliest works of this type. Magdalena Abakanowicz started producing them in the 1960s. Louis Bourgeois in the 1980s.

1976 (66) Max Ernst died aged 84 in Paris and in 1979 she returned to New York.

1980s (70s), she described her life as quiet and serene and her most productive period now that she was alone. She was never a mother, "But I think leaving a string of paintings is not a bad thing to do."

1990s (80s) and 2000s (90s) she turned to writing and poetry. She had a stroke in the mid-90s. She painted 12 lush flower paintings (Georgia O'Keefe). Age 94 she published her first novel *Chasm* concerning a little girl, a lion and numerous body parts.

QUOTES

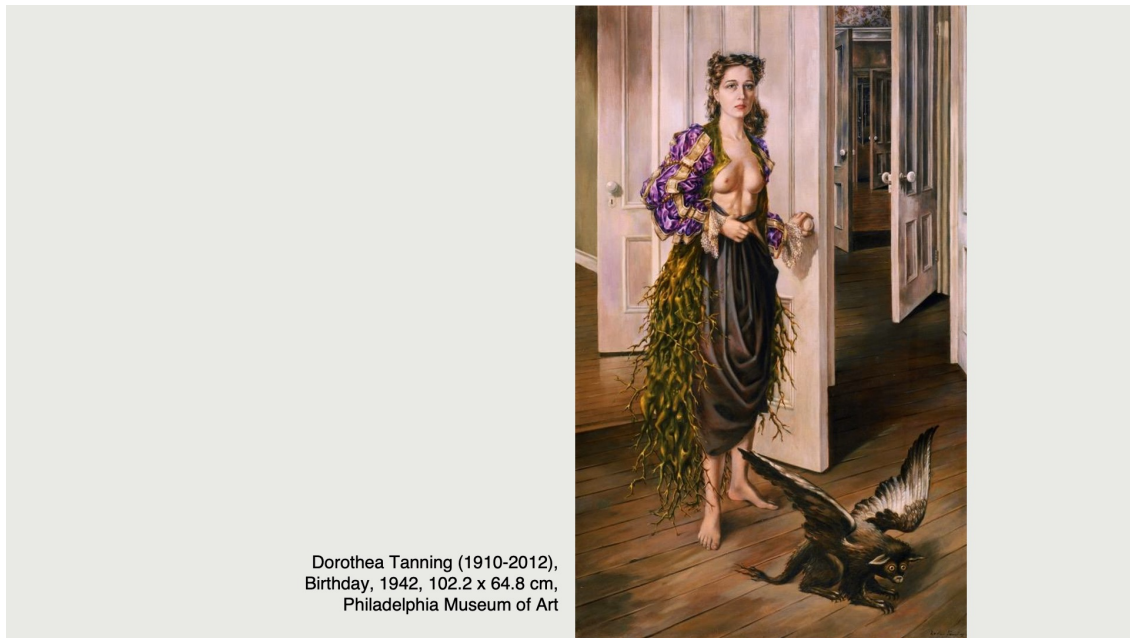
- In reply to the question "So what have you tried to communicate as an artist? What were your goals, and have you achieved them?" Tanning replies: "I'd be satisfied with

having suggested that there is more than meets the eye."

- In reply to the question "What do you think of some of the artwork being produced today?" Tanning replies: "I can't answer that without enraging the art world. It's enough to say that most of it comes straight out of Dada, 1917. I get the impression that the idea is to shock. So many people labouring to outdo Duchamp's urinal. It isn't even shocking anymore, just kind of sad."
- When speaking on her relationship with Ernst in an interview, Tanning said: "I was a loner, am a loner, good Lord, it's the only way I can imagine working. And then when I hooked up with Max Ernst, he was clearly the only person I needed and, I assure you, we never, never talked art. Never."
- "If it wasn't known that I had been a Surrealist, I don't think it would be evident in what I'm doing now. But I'm branded as a Surrealist. Tant pis ('never mind')."
- "Women artists. There is no such thing—or person. It's just as much a contradiction in terms as "man artist" or "elephant artist." You may be a woman and you may be an artist; but the one is a given and the other is you".
- "Art has always been the raft onto which we climb to save our sanity".
- Tanning wrote later that during her adolescence in Galesburg "nothing happened but the wallpaper".
- Dorothea Tanning, *La Chambre d'Amis*, 1950-2. In her unpublished notes she describes her shock at how a museum she visited with Max Ernst would not show any naked women in case it offended schoolgirls. She wrote, "the most beautiful object of nature is the human body".

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Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012), *Birthday*, 1942, 102.2 x 64.8 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

- Her relationship with Ernst started when he was helping his wife with an exhibition called *30 Women*, part of *Art of this Century*. When he saw this work by Tanning Ernst persuaded his wife to call the exhibition *31 Women* and add Tanning. Ernst and Tanning played chess together and fell in love and within a week he had moved in with her and Guggenheim said she wished she had kept it as *30 Women*. Ernst and Tanning spent the rest of their lives together first in New York, then Arizona, then in France.
- Ernst was enchanted by this painting and he suggested the title *Birthday* which refers to her birth as a surrealist artist. The overskirt looks like branches or tendrils, but if you look closer there are swarming bodies. It is a self-portrait of a triumphant female warrior, a woman with power she can activate and energise. In the foreground is a gryphon and behind here endlessly opening doors like a dreamscape.

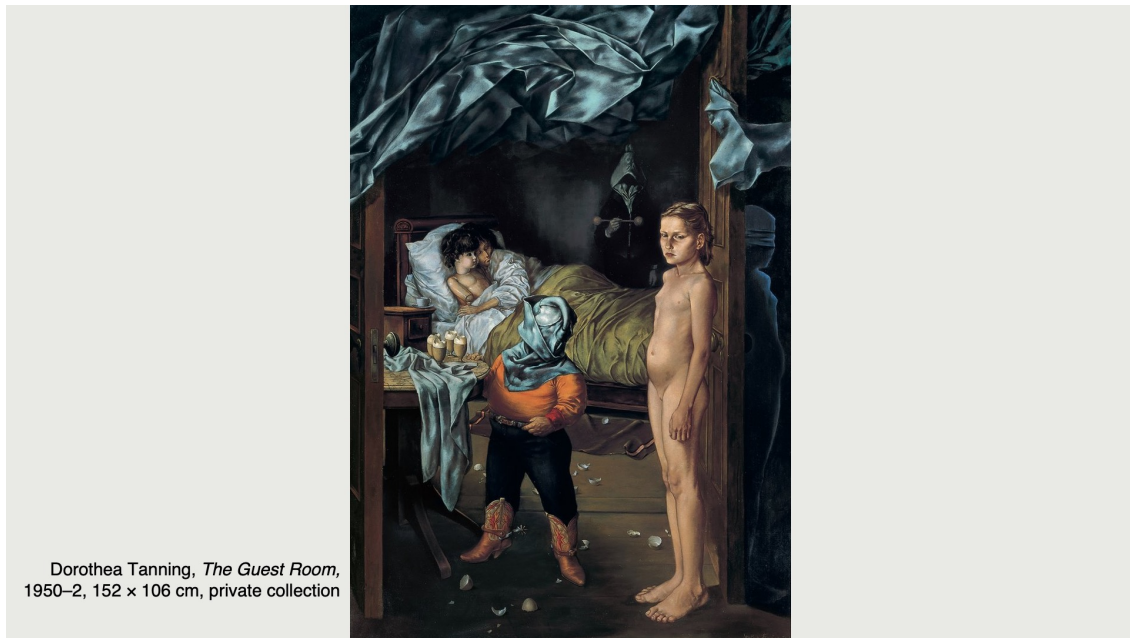
- Since antiquity a gryphon was thought to combine the king of the beasts, the lion, with the king of the birds, the eagle, and it was thought to possess magical powers and to protect priceless possessions. This gryphon though has the face of a lemur which may symbolise dark desires as does the overskirt of roots.
- Open doors are common themes in her art of this period and they suggest suppressed desires. The doors form a maze stretching into the distance and doors hide and reveal secrets.
- Tanning married Ernst four years later in a double ceremony with Man Ray and the dancer Juliet Browner. They moved to Sedona Arizona and built a house and hosted many friends including Henri Cartier-Bresson, Lee Miller who I talk about next, the artist and historian Roland Penrose who later married Lee Miller, Yves Tanguy, Truman Capote the novelist, Dylan Thomas and many others.
- In 1943 she published her first short story and in total published six books (two memoirs and two collections of poems) and she had her first solo exhibition the following year.
- The surreal images she painted in the 1940s labelled her as a Surrealist despite an individual style that developed over 60 years. She became a friend of the artist Marcel Duchamp and the composer John Cage; designed sets and costumes for several of George Balanchine's ballets and appeared in two of Hans Richter's avant-garde films.
- Her career was overshadowed by always being known as Ernst's wife although he always called her Dorothea Tanning. They never discussed art. She disliked being

labelled ('like a concentration camp tattoo') as a Surrealist. She hated being described as a woman artist, she said, "Women artists. There is no such thing – or person. It's just as much a contradiction in terms as 'man artist' or 'elephant artist'".

NOTES

- The co-curator of the Tate's exhibition of Tanning's art said. "We often read the dress as a typical of [the artist] self-fashioning herself, like Frida Kahlo or Leonora Carrington, but in Tanning's memoirs she refers specifically to going to thrift stores and picking up dresses for \$5 to modify them and turn up looking exquisite at a party. She refers to this dress as a 'Shakespearean costume.'

<https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-45-spring-2019/dorothea-tanning-shape-shifter-lauren-elkin>



Dorothea Tanning, *The Guest Room*, 1950–2, 152 × 106 cm, private collection

- During the decade after the war, she amassed an extraordinary body of paintings depicting girlhood as a time of dangerous appetites and uncanny erotic power.
- One work from this period shows a strange domestic interior, a naked young girl and a short person whose head is covered. There is a dark menacing figure of death in the background and in the bed a girl cuddles an amputated mannequin. On the table there are four eggs with their tops removed and there are egg shells scattered over the floor. The picture is disturbing as it contains a naked young girl and it is more disturbing when we find out the the model was a young local girl who refused to remove her bra and panties. Tanning filled in those parts of the girl later without her permission.
- Tanning had written a story the year before called *Abyss* in which a house guest called Albert meets the seven-year old daughter of his host in the attic. The girl invites

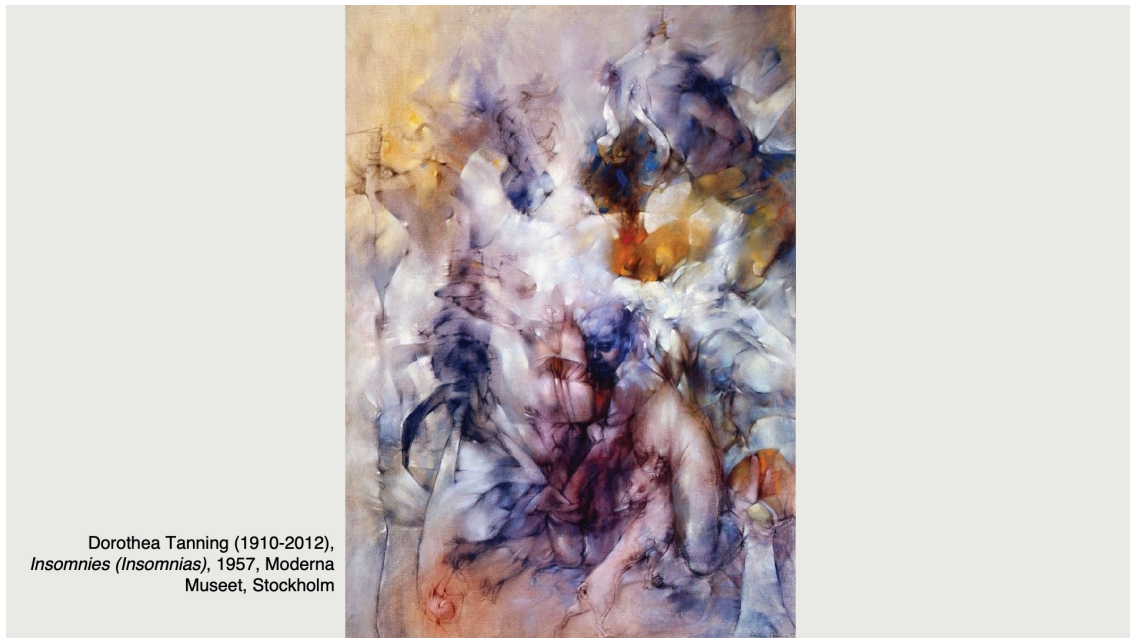
the man into a room filled with odd bricabrac and she tells him to eat her dinner and in return she will show him her memory box. He sits at a little table and eats her food and in her memory box are real eyes given to her by a friendly lion

- We have a long note written by Tanning about this painting. She tells how she and Ernst visited the basement of a museum which had a naked giant fertility figure. When the curator was asked why it was not on display he explained that schoolgirls visited the museum and it was considered too shocking. This puzzled Ernst as schoolgirls have the same bodily parts. Ernst and Tanning bought the fertility figure from the museum and took it with them wherever they went.**

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Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012), *Insomnies (Insomnias)*, 1957, Moderna Museet, Stockholm

- “In 1949, Tanning and Ernst started to spend more time in Paris, eventually moving there in the 50s. In Paris it was hard to ignore the latest art movements, such as abstract expressionism and away from the desert she had greater freedom to reinvent her style and palette.
- In 1955, her style changed, becoming more gestural and abstract as we see here. In her autobiography she wrote that “my canvases literally splintered”. The pictures grew, and the brush strokes became larger and messier. These are more nebulous images but they are still populated by human bodies, whose limbs and torsos stretch across the canvas.” (*The Guardian*)



Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012), *Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202* (*Poppy Hotel, Room 202*), 1970-73, fabric, wool, synthetic fur, cardboard, and Ping-Pong balls, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

- From 1969 to 1973, Tanning embarked on what she described as "an intense five-year adventure in soft sculpture," concentrating on a body of three-dimensional works in fabric. Her soft fabric works are the earliest works of this type. Magdalena Abakanowicz started producing them in the 1960s. Louis Bourgeois in the 1980s.
- The high point of this phase of her work was *Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202* (*Poppy Hotel, Room 202*, 1970–73, Pompidou) and it includes five of these soft sculptures. Tanning believes the work relates to a song popular in her childhood which laments the fate of Kitty Kane a Chicago gangster's wife who poisoned herself in room 202. The words Tanning remembers are
 "In room two hundred and two
 The walls keep talkin' to you

**I'll never tell you what they said
So turn out the light and come to bed."**

- **She had numerous solo exhibitions in Europe and America and in her eighties she was encouraged by a friend to concentrate on her poetry which she had published throughout her life.**

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Lee Miller (1907-1977), *Max Ernst and Dorothea Tanning*, Oak Creek Canyon, 1946

- **As I said Tanning and Ernst built a house in Sedona, Arizona and hosted many friends including the photographer Lee Miller who took this picture. Miller took 400 photographs of the desert and her hosts and this is her most famous image. It shows a giant Ernst striding forwards out of the picture towards us, his expression part inspired, part demonic Tanning gazes up at him from just behind like some shrunken Alice in Wonderland. Is Miller showing us the power dynamics of men and women in the world of surrealism or is it a surrealist fairytale?**
- Her most famous quote was "Women artists. There is no such thing— or person. It's just as much a contradiction in terms as 'man artist' or 'elephant artist'".

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- **Lee Miller is the forgotten Surrealist, perhaps because of her beauty, or because she started as a fashion model or her relationship with Man Ray, let's find out...**

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Man Ray, *Solarised Portrait of Lee Miller*, 1929 aged 22

- She went from being a model to fashion photographer, Surrealist, war correspondent and finally Lady Penrose and gourmet cook. She was a friend of all the famous artists of the period including the woman Surrealist Meret Oppenheim, Pablo Picasso, Paul Éluard and Jean Cocteau who was mesmerised by her beauty.
- This is a photograph of her when she was 22. On a technical note this photograph is solarised. Solarisation is a technique that involved exposing the print to light in the darkroom before it has been fixed. It is said it was discovered by Miller when a mouse ran over her foot in the darkroom and she briefly switched on the light. The technique was much admired by Surrealists as the effects were difficult to control and depended on the subconscious timing of the light switch.

BIO :MILLER

- Elizabeth "Lee" Miller, Lady Penrose (April 23, 1907 – July 21, 1977), was an American photographer and

photojournalist. She was a fashion model in New York City in the 1920s before going to Paris, where she became a fashion and fine art photographer. During the Second World War, she was a war correspondent for *Vogue*, covering events such as the London Blitz, the liberation of Paris, and the concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau.

- Miller was born in New York and when she was seven she was raped by a family friend. She was expelled from almost every school she attended and when she was eighteen she moved to Paris to study lighting, costume and design. She returned to New York to study life drawing and painting.
- Her father introduced her to photography and used his nude teenage daughter as a model. When she was 19 she left her apartment in Manhattan and was almost hit by traffic but, by chance, the publisher of *Vogue* pulled her back. Within a few months she was on the cover of both British and American *Vogue* and became a model for their image of the 'modern girl'. She immediately became one of the most sought after models in New York but then one photograph was used to advertise menstrual pads without her permission and this ended her career in fashion.
- In 1929, aged 21, she went back to Paris with the intention of becoming Man Ray's student. He insisted he never took students but she soon became his muse, model and lover. She set up her own studio and often took Man Ray's assignments so her photographs of this period are often credited to Man Ray. They rediscovered the technique of solarisation and it became their distinctive visual signature.
- Amongst Miller's circle of friends were Pablo Picasso and fellow Surrealists Paul Éluard and Jean Cocteau, the latter of whom was so mesmerised by Miller's beauty that he included a plaster statue of her in one of his films.

- In 1932 she left Ray and returned to New York and set up a very successful photography studio and had a number of exhibition including her only solo exhibition.
- In 1934 she married an Egyptian businessman, left her studio and went to live in Egypt. She took many photographs in the desert around Cairo.
- In 1937, she grew bored with Cairo and returned to Paris where she met the British surrealist painter and curator Roland Penrose. At the start of WWII she was living in Hampstead with Penrose and when the bombing started she ignored pleas to come home and became a photojournalist for *Vogue* recording the Blitz. After D-Day she travelled to France, recorded the liberation of Paris, the Battle of Alsace and the horror of Nazi concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau. One famous photograph of this period taken. By a friend shows Miller taking a bath in Hitler's bathtub with her boots on the floor covered in dirt from Buchenwald.

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Lee Miller (1907-1977), *Bathing Feature*, Vogue Studio, London, 1941

- **Miller was born in New York and when she was seven she was raped by a family friend. She was expelled from almost every school she attended and when she was eighteen she moved to Paris to study lighting, costume and design. She returned to New York to study life drawing and painting.**
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- In Paris she was not content to be just Man Ray's muse and she set up a studio of her own. He would often send her on his own photography assignment in his place. Her studio had famous clients such as Coco Chanel. Man Ray became jealous of all her male admirers and to maintain her independence she left him in Paris and returned to New York in 1932 and set up a very successful photography studio and had a number of exhibition including her only solo exhibition. Although she took this fashion photograph for *Vogue* later it is typical of the work she undertook for them in 1932 to 1934. She photographed celebrities and undertook fashion and product photo assignments. In 1934 she was hailed as one of the most “distinguished living photographers” by *Vanity Fair*.



René Magritte (1898–1967), *Le baiser* ('The Kiss'), 1938, gouache on paper, 27 x 34 cm.



Lee Miller (1907-1977), *Portrait of Space, Nr Siwa, Egypt*, 1937

Lee Miller (1907-1977), *Portrait of Space, Nr Siwa, Egypt*, 1937.

René Magritte (1898–1967), *Le baiser* ('The Kiss'), 1938, gouache on paper, 27 x 34 cm.

- She renewed her acquaintance with an Egyptian businessman that she had met in Paris (Aziz Eloui Bey) and was swept off her feet and married him almost immediately. She moved to Cairo and stopped taking professional photographs but continued to document the world around her.
- She became tired of Egypt and travelled to France where she spent time with Pablo Picasso, her sometime lover, and his friends. During this time, Miller was a prolific fashion photographer, shooting for British *Vogue*.
- This photograph is said to have been the inspiration for the painting entitled 'Le Baiser' (*The Kiss*) by the Belgian Surrealist Rene Magritte.
- When war broke out she applied to become a war correspondent and became the only female combat

correspondent in Europe during the war. She joined the 83rd Infantry Division of the US Army, and was in the front line of the Allied advance from Normandy to Paris. She was liked by the soldiers as she could swear as well as them and put up with being under fire.

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<https://tankmagazine.com/tank/2018/06/lee-miller/>



Lee Miller (1907-1977), *Surgeon and Anaesthetist at 44th Evacuation Hospital, Normandy, France, 1944*

- **At the start of WWII she was living in Hampstead with Penrose and when the bombing started she ignored pleas to come home and became a photojournalist for *Vogue* recording the Blitz. After D-Day she travelled to France, recorded the liberation of Paris, the Battle of Alsace and the horror of Nazi concentration camps at Buchenwald and Dachau.**



David Scherman, *Lee Miller In Hitler's Bathtub*, 1945, LIFE Picture Collection

- There are so many photographs of Lee Miller that I wanted to only show you work by her but I couldn't omit this one as it is so famous.
- Miller was one of the first to discover the concentration camps and her photographs of piles of skeletal bodies at Buchenwald were printed in *Vogue*.
- The same day she travelled to Munich and broke into Hitler's apartment with fellow war photographer David Scherman. She removed her clothes and boots still caked in mud from the concentration camp and had a bath in Hitler's bath. Just hours later Hitler and Eva Braun committed suicide in his bunker in Berlin.
- After the war she became pregnant by Surrealist artist Roland Penrose who she married and they moved to New York where she gave birth to Anthony Penrose. She suffered from post traumatic stress disorder which was not recognised at the time and she became a deeply

depressed alcoholic. She worked her way through her traumas by becoming a gourmet cook. However, her son Anthony suffered from her drunken verbal abuse and she never mentioned her life as a model, artist and war correspondent. After she died aged 80 he discovered her archive of photographs, negatives and Vogue issues in her attic. He said, "Until then, I'd seen her as a booze-soaked, hysterical woman. I had to re-evaluate my entire attitude to her." She also kept her childhood abuse secret from both her husband and son. When they found out Anthony said, "I wish we'd known—it would have enabled us to understand."

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Dora Maar (1907-1997) was a French photographer, painter and poet who is best known for her relationship with Pablo Picasso. These men keep cropping up.

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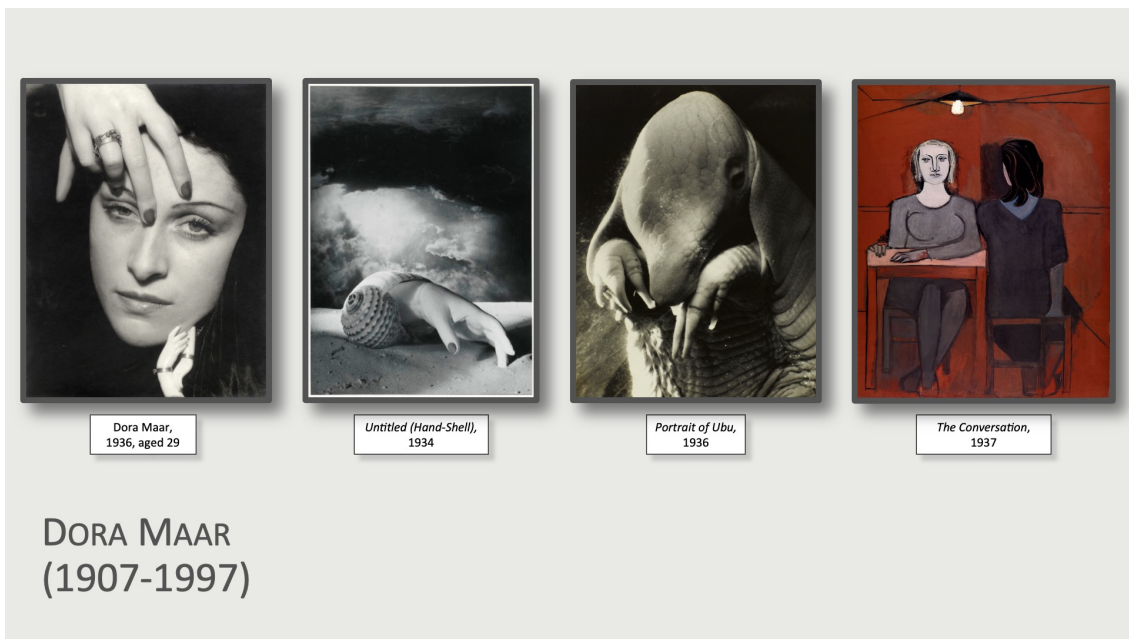
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Man Ray, *Dora Maar*, 1936, aged 29

- She was born Henriette Theodora Markovitch, in 1907, and her father was a Croatian architect who had settled in Paris which the family left when Maar was three for her father to work in Buenos Aires where he had won several prestigious assignments.
- When she was 19 the family returned to Paris and she changed her name to Dora Maar. She studied at a decorative arts college and the Paris School of Photography. She also enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian which had the advantage of offering the same instruction to women as to men.
- She became a successful painter and fashion and street photographer. Later she influenced Picasso and was the model for *Weeping Woman* and was close to many of the Surrealists. All her life she was experimental and never stopped creating.

BIO:MAAR

- Henriette Theodora Markovitch (1907–1997), known as Dora Maar, was a French photographer, painter, and poet. A love partner of Pablo Picasso, Maar was depicted in a number of Picasso's paintings, including his *Portrait of Dora Maar* and *Dora Maar au Chat*.
- Her father was a Croatian architect who had settled in Paris after studying in Zagreb and Vienna. In 1910 when she was three the family left for Buenos Aires where her father won several prestigious commissions.
- In 1926 when she was 19 the family returned to Paris and she chose the pseudonym Dora Maar and studied at the Central Union of Decorative Arts and the School of Photography. She also enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian which had the advantage of offering the same instruction to women as to men. She went to Barcelona and then London where she photographed the effects of the economic depression. On her return to Paris she opened a studio and in the early 1930s worked on commercial assignments for advertisements and fashion magazines. Her work was influenced by the ideas of Surrealism as she thought our intuitions are more important than the straight representation of the world.
- In 1935 she was introduced to Pablo Picasso and became his muse and lover. She photographed the stages of the development of his epic work *Guernica*. most well known of these portraits is The Weeping Woman. Picasso was very inspired by the tragedies of the Spanish Civil War, and he thought of Dora Maar as a living depiction of the pain and suffering that people experienced during this time. Dora did not appreciate Picasso's depiction of her in this way. When asked about his portraits of her, she said "all portraits of me are lies. They're Picassos. Not one is Dora Maar".

- *Portrait of Ubu* is her most famous work of the period and The photograph represents the central character in a popular series of plays by Alfred Jarry called *Ubu Roi*. The work was first shown at the Exposition Surréaliste d'objets in Paris and at the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936.
- Her relationship with Picasso ended in 1943 and she suffered from a nervous breakdown. He had bullied her in many ways including insisting she abandon photography in which she excelled and take up painting in which he was the master. After their separation she truly became a painter. She turned to the Catholic religion and turned to abstract painting which remained unknown until after her death.

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Dora Maar, *Ship in Hair*, an advertisement for hair oil



Dora Maar, *Untitled (Hand-Shell)*, 1934

Dora Maar (1907-1997), *Untitled (Hand-Shell)*, 1934,
 photograph by Dora Maar / Courtesy Centre Pompidou /
 Philippe Migeat / RMN-GP

Dora Maar, *Ship in Hair*, an advertisement for hair oil

- She opened a studio in Paris as a commercial photographer working for advertising companies and fashion magazines. Her work was influenced by the ideas of Surrealism as she thought our intuitions are more important than the straight representation of the world. The earliest examples of this approach were in pictures she took of Mont-Saint-Michel in 1931 where she has double exposures, skewed perspective and assertive gargoyles.
- She took slightly perverse photographs of street scenes in Paris, London and Barcelona. She also used this surreal approach in her commercial activities, for example, a tiny ship afloat on a sea of hair to advertise hair oil.
- She produced photomontages like this one. From a shell

resting on sand, a dummy hand protrudes, with delicate fingers and painted nails, just like Maar's own. Other photographers of the period used surreal images as a type of visual style but Maar goes further and references other artists, such as Georges Bataille's images of crustaceans and Claude Cahun's hands with their masturbatory implications.

NOTES

- The earliest evidence of the voraciousness and oddity of Maar's vision is in pictures she took of Mont-Saint-Michel in 1931, for an illustrated book by the art historian Germain Bazin. There are double exposures of a church and its interior, skewed perspectives with photobombing gargoyles. She treated statues and deserted streets in Paris in similar fashion, and, in 1934, travelled to London and Barcelona, where she took rapt, slightly perverse street photographs, fixated on fragments of advertising, amputated mannequins, and awkwardly posed children, who would soon reappear in her Surrealist montages. She had a commercial studio—initially with the photographer and film set designer Pierre Kéfer—where she produced work of glossy playfulness: a tiny ship on a sea of hair, to advertise hair oil; a fashion shoot in which the model's head has been obscured by a large, glittering star.
- Maar's early photomontages look almost as modish and styled as her fashion work. From a shell resting on sand, a dummy hand protrudes, with delicate fingers and painted nails, just like Maar's own. In a way, the image could be by one of many photographers of the period—Cecil Beaton, say, or Angus McBean—who politely surrealized their pictures, as if the artistic movement were merely a visual style. Except: there is something ominously self-involved

about this hybrid thing. The shell and hand recall Bataille's obsessions with crustaceans, mollusks, and orphaned or butchered body parts. The hand rhymes with similar ones in the photographs of Claude Cahun, where they sometimes have masturbatory implications. And what are we to make of the storm-lit, gothic sky that looms over this auto-curious object?

- The most accomplished examples of Maar's art are the photomontages of 1935 and 1936. There were already many vaults and arches in her Mont-Saint-Michel pictures; now she took the cloistral galleries of the Orangerie at Versailles, upended them so that they looked like sewers, and populated them with cryptic beings engaged in arcane rituals or dramas. In "The Simulator," a boy from one of her street photographs is bent backward at an obscene angle; Maar has retouched his eyes so that they roll back in his head toward us, like one of those thrashing hysterics photographed in the nineteenth century. In "29 Rue d'Astorg"—of which Maar made several versions, black-and-white and hand-colored—a human figure with a curtailed, avian head is seated beneath arches that have been subtly warped in the darkroom.

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Dora Maar (1907-1997), *Portrait of Ubu*, 1936, Centre Pompidou

- In 1936 Maar showed this photograph at the International Surrealist Exhibition in London. The title refers to a play called *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry which was first performed in 1896. The audience rioted at the end and the play was a scandal and was banned in Paris but is now seen as revolutionary and the beginning of modernism and a precursor to Dada and Surrealism. The central character King Ubu is childish, fat, ugly, vulgar, cowardly and stupid and is often shown with a pointed head.
- Maar would never say what the clawed, scaly creature was, nor where she had come across it. Her Ubu, like the character in the play, is pig and louse-like with sad eyes and drooping ears, it also resembles an ass or an elephant. Scholars generally agree that the monster is in fact an armadillo foetus, preserved in a specimen jar.
- In 1935, Maar met Pablo Picasso, and the two began a relationship, which would last for nine years. Picasso

encouraged Maar toward painting and away from photography, perhaps because she outshone him in photography...

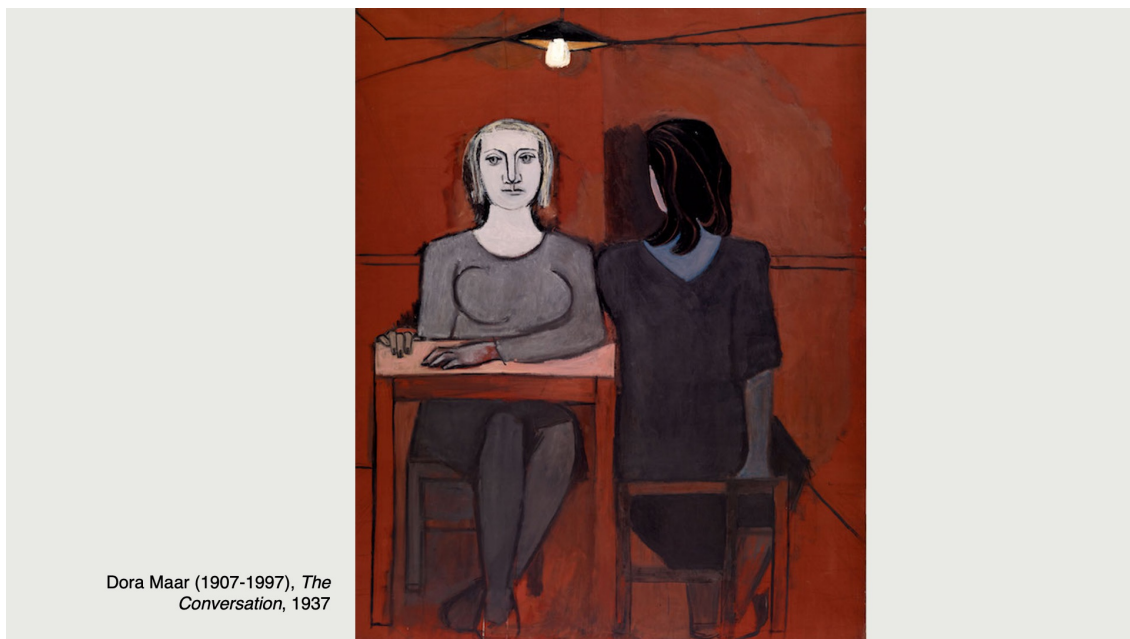
NOTES

- “In 1936, at the summit of her celebrity as a photographic artist, Dora Maar showed her picture “Portrait of Ubu” in the International Surrealist Exhibition, at the New Burlington Galleries, London. Named after a scatological, ur-Surrealist play by Alfred Jarry, from 1896, the black-and-white photograph shows a ghastly being of indeterminate origin and melancholy aspect. Maar would never say what the clawed, scaly creature was, nor where she had come across it. Her Ubu has elements of Jarry’s porcine, louse-like original, and, with its doleful eye and drooping ears, it also resembles an ass or an elephant. Scholars generally agree that the monster is in fact an armadillo fetus, preserved in a specimen jar. It is also an idea: something like l’informe, the concept Maar’s lover Georges Bataille coined to describe his fellow-Surrealists’ admiration for all things larval and grotesquely about-to-be.” (Brian Dillon, 2019)
- All this strangeness did not last. In 1935, Maar met Pablo Picasso, and the two began a relationship, which would last for nine years. Early in their time together, they collaborated on photograms and drawings scratched onto photographic paper. Maar documented the painting of Picasso’s “Guernica,” producing an essential art-historical resource, as well as evidence of their creative intimacy. (According to the art historian John Richardson, Maar also made some of the vertical brushstrokes on the horse at the center of the painting.) Picasso encouraged Maar toward painting and away from photography—and then he left her, for Françoise Gilot. Maar had a breakdown, slowly recovered her poise,

carried on making art. She was old and infirm and had retired to a house in Provence by the time she went back to photography, adding floral photogram borders to her early portraits of Surrealist friends and peers. Devout, reclusive, and famously jealous of her photographic legacy, she seems to have died fully aware of the dark miracle of her work.

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Dora Maar (1907-1997), *The Conversation*, 1937

Dora Maar (1907-1997), *The Conversation*, 1937, 162 x 130 cm, Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte, Madrid

- In *The Conversation* she show herself on the right with her back to us. She has turned to the left to look at Picasso's former lover (and mother of their daughter), Marie-Thérèse Walter, with whom Picasso remained close throughout the relationship with Maar.
- We cannot see Maar's face, but she is a dark pillar, a nonentity. Marie-Thérèse Walter occupies a confident, full frontal position at the table, her legs elegantly crossed at the ankles and her arms on its top. Her elbows are out and defensive, her eyes slips sideways, their focus out of frame.
- After nine years Picasso left Maar, not for Marie-Thérèse Walter but for the much younger Françoise Gilot. When they met she was 21 and Picasso was 61. Maar had a breakdown but slowly recovered and carried on making art. Devout, reclusive, and famously jealous of her

photographic legacy, she died aged 89 aware of the dark legacy and influence of her work.

- **Until recently she always seen as Picasso's lover. As she said, “I’m still too famous as Picasso’s mistress to be accepted as a painter.” But recently she has had many exhibitions, including Tate Modern in 2019-2020, that present her as an artist in her own right.**

NOTES

- "Consider the most directly autobiographical room, which is dominated by her magnificent painting, *The Conversation*, 1937. Though he is not pictorially present, Picasso features almost palpably. (It’s also worth noting that Maar’s stark bulb hanging from the ceiling later reappeared in his anti-war polemic, *Guernica*). In the painting, she depicts herself on the opposite side of a table to Picasso’s former lover (and mother of their daughter), Marie-Thérèse Walter, with whom Picasso remained close throughout the relationship with Maar. Maar’s back is to us so we cannot see her face, though her body language is explicit enough: while her feet point away from the table, her head is turned to face Walter, as if she is looking at her in spite of herself or because she feels it to be some kind of duty. Her right hand braces the chair behind her back to keep her from reverting to her original position and her left arm appears to ply across her body in comfort or protection. Her body is neatly tucked, so that in the painting she is defined by her dress and appears as a solid pillar of grey. Yet we learn just as much (if not more) about her from her depiction of Walter. She occupies a confident, full frontal position at the table, her legs elegantly crossed at the ankles and her arms on its top — but her entire being skews away from Maar. Her elbows are out and defensive, her eyes slips sideways, their focus out of

frame. It's clear she wishes to will herself not to see her. A good portraitist must be both outgoing and self-effacing as bringing other people out is the focus. So even when Maar depicts herself, the clearest picture comes through the intermediary of other people." (The Arts Desk)

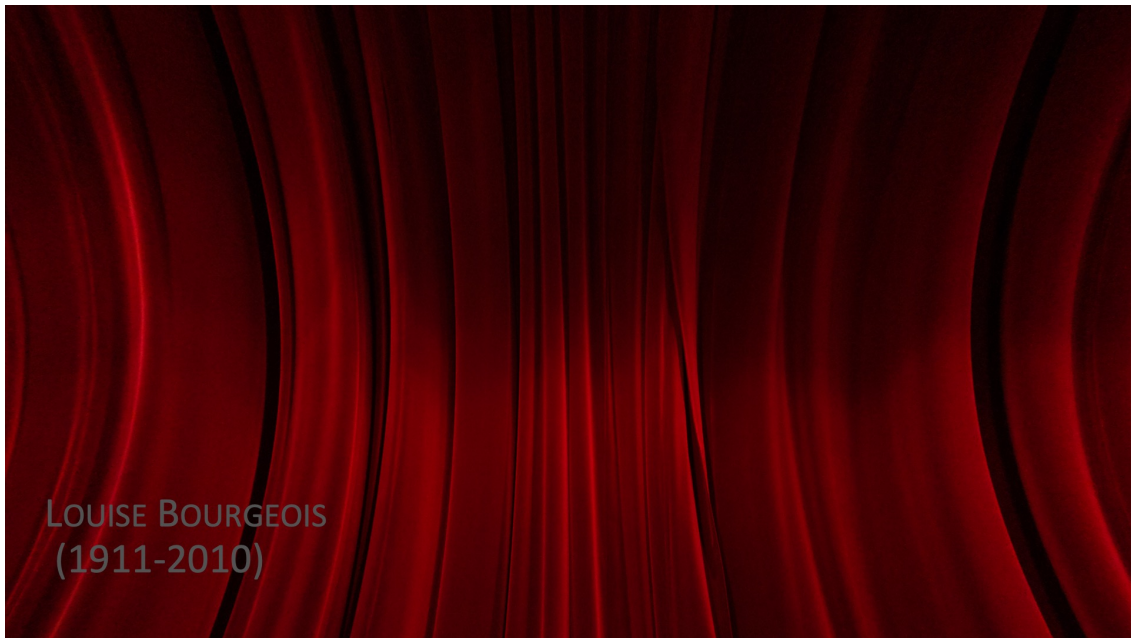
QUOTATIONS

- "I must dwell apart in the desert," the artist and surrealist photographer Dora Maar once said. "I want to create an aura of mystery about my work. People must long to see it."
- "I'm still too famous as Picasso's mistress to be accepted as a painter."
- These words form part of a conversation recorded by Maar's friend, the art writer James Lord, in his memoir "Picasso and Dora." During the exchange, the French artist also explains how she rationalised the work of her later years, given that she rarely exhibited and was not in demand. ...
- With its deliberate focus on their art, the exhibition doesn't address certain troubling questions about the pair's unequal personal relationship. In her memoirs, Picasso's later lover, Françoise Gilot, recounted the brutal bullying to which the artist subjected Maar. Picasso once described the time that Maar and a previous lover, Marie-Thérèse Walter, came to blows in his studio as one of his "choicest memories."
- It's a subject Maar didn't shy away from in her art, painting herself alongside Walter in "The Conversation," one of the works on show at the Tate Modern. Maar is depicted facing away while Walter looks directly at the viewer.
- During the aforementioned exchange with James Lord, Maar told the writer that Picasso's portraits of her were "lies." But the struggle for recognition she went on to describe is more

insightful – that she had to survive in the “desert” to be celebrated on her own terms.

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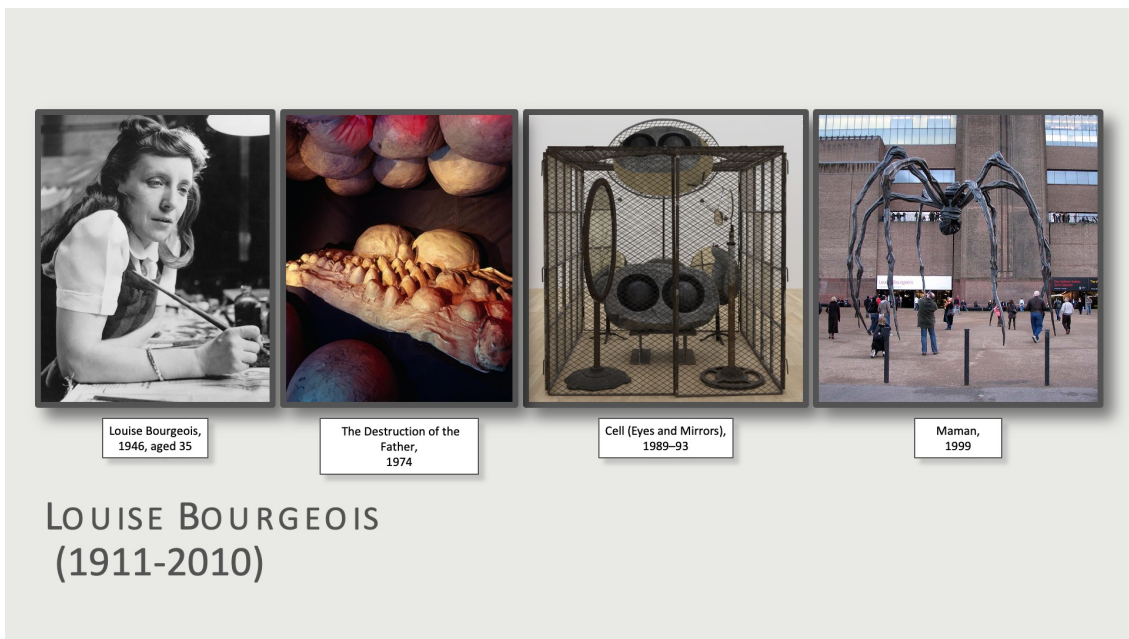
LOUISE BOURGEOIS
(1911-2010)

My last artist is Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) who worked in sculpture, painting and drawing. Her work was autobiographical often drawing on her childhood experiences such as her father's infidelity.

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Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) in the studio of her apartment at 142 East 18th Street, New York, c. 1946

- **Louise Josephine Bourgeois (1911-2010) was born in Paris to parents who owned a gallery selling tapestries. When she was a few years old her parents moved out of Paris. Her complex relationship with her parents was to become a powerful source of inspiration for her later work.**
- **Her mother suffered from ill health and Louise cared for her for long periods until her mother's death when Louise was 22.**
- **Her father had a series of mistresses which led to a fear of being abandoned, a key theme of her work. The First World War began when she was three which made her memories even more traumatic and intense.**
- **Her mother was logical and intellectual and her father emotional and passionate and these opposing forces also played a key role in Louise's later work.**

BIO:BOURGEOIS

- Louise Josephine Bourgeois (1911-2010) was born in Paris to parents who owned a gallery selling tapestries. When she was a few years old her parents moved out of Paris. Her complex relationship with her parents was to become a powerful source of inspiration for her later work. Her mother suffered from ill health and Louise cared for her for long periods until her mother's death when Louise was 22. Her father had a series of mistresses which led to a fear of being abandoned, a key theme of her work. The First World War began when she was three which made her memories even more traumatic and intense.
- Her mother was logical and intellectual and her father emotional and passionate and these opposing forces also played a key role in Louise's later work.
- In 1930 she entered the Sorbonne to study mathematics and geometry which she valued for their stability. While there her mother died and the death inspired her to switch from mathematics to art. In one class Fernand Léger advised her to become a sculptor not a painter. After graduating in 1935 she studied first at the École des Beaux-Arts and École du Louvre, and after 1932 in various academies.
- She opened a print shop and met a visiting American art professor, Robert Goldwater (m. 1937-1973) who she married and they moved to New York where he taught. They had three sons and remained married until his death in 1973.
- The 1940s were a difficult period for her as she struggled to enter the exhibition world of new York. Her work was made from junkyard scraps and driftwood.
- She continued producing art until a week before she died aged 98 in New York.

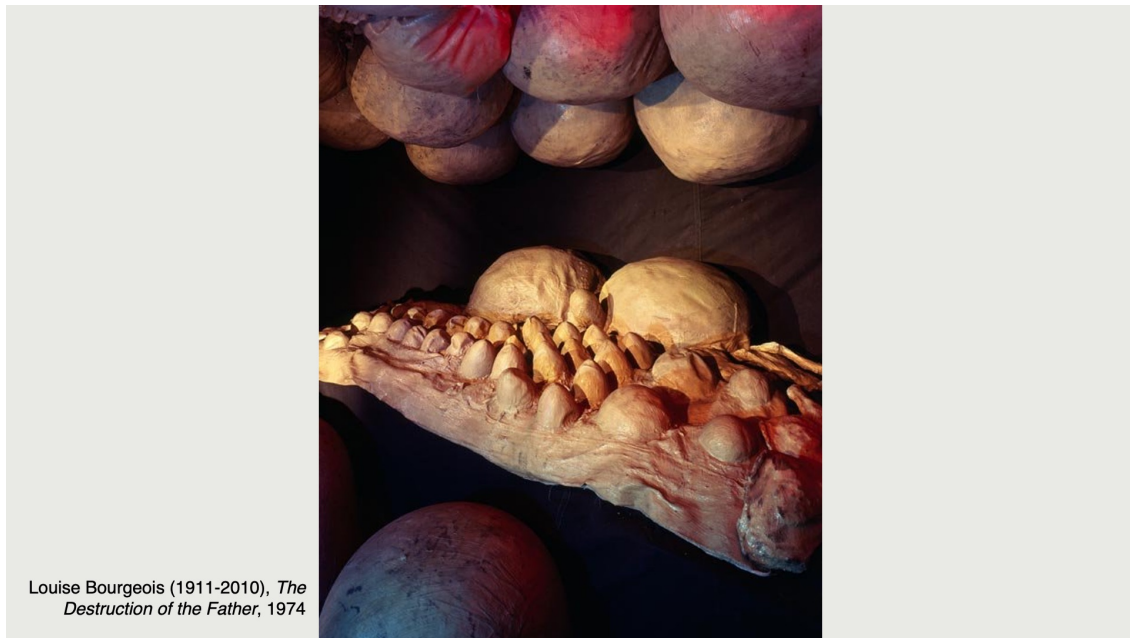
QUOTES

- *I was in effect a runaway girl. I was a runaway girl who turned out alright.*
- *I transform hate into love.*
- *I need to make things. The physical interaction with the medium has a curative effect. I need the physical acting out. I need to have these objects exist in relation to my body.*

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Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), *The Destruction of the Father*, 1974

Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), *The Destruction of the Father*, 1974

- There is far more to this work than is apparent at first glance and you need to know the story of her life.
- When her mother became sick with influenza her father had an affair with Louise's English tutor. Louise was a child but was very aware of the situation. Her father repeatedly told his wife he loved her and this double standard of professing love while betraying and lying to her is expressed in a lot of her work.
- This is the family dinner table and the matrimonial bed. She remembered that her tutor has 'enormous' breasts. When she discovered the betrayal she felt enormous rage and imagined wringing the neck of the mistress and the children devouring their father. This is a visceral representation of rage, hate and revenge.
- *But she said later "I transform hate into love" and the way she did this was making things that expressed her deepest feeling. She said, "I need to make things. The*

physical interaction with the medium has a curative effect. I need the physical acting out. I need to have these objects exist in relation to my body."

NOTES

- "... the defining event; that, the way she tells it, was her father's affair with Sadie Richmond, the woman he hired to teach English to his children. Bourgeois remembers Sadie's 'enormous' breasts and the rage she felt on discovering her betrayal: 'In my orchestrated recall, I twist the neck of the mistress ... *The Destruction of the Father* (1974) represents a family dinner table; the gloating patriarch is being devoured by his tyrannised children. This isn't just a great work in its own right; it's a visceral statement of intent. A cauldron deep inside the artist, by now a widow, has finally boiled over.'" (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/oct/14/art>)
- "This was Bourgeois's first installation piece at a time when installation art was in its infancy and was being used by feminists such as Judy Chicago. The work was also Bourgeois's first to explicitly reveal her anger over her father's infidelity, which was an underlying motivation for much of her work. Relying on the soft forms of her Landscape series and her often explicit body imagery, the work reenacts a childhood fantasy wherein she takes revenge on her father, who always gloated and bragged at the dinner table. A life-size dining table in a cave or womb-like space is covered with flesh-colored anthropomorphic forms that appear like dismembered body parts as well as actual joints of lamb, which underscore implied violence. The scene is bathed in a soft red light that symbolizes anger, death, and blood, inviting the viewer to witness the aftermath of the killing. Plaster, latex, wood, fabric" (The Art Story)

- "This is the first self-enclosed environment or installation Bourgeois created. The bulbous abscesses used in earlier works are now encased in a box and dramatised by a red light, giving a very claustrophobic effect; as in the theatre, you can only view the work from the front. Here Bourgeois celebrates a childhood fantasy of slaying and consuming her dictatorial father at the supper table." (Tate)
- "This is one of Bourgeois pieces which tells of her deep interest in psychoanalysis. This piece really looks into her feelings of her father, it takes him apart and displays him for us here. He was very dominating but not trustworthy. The piece both resembles a bed and a table, both are places where she felt bad feelings of betrayal and suffering respectively. The view of this as a bed that is disgusting and corroded is influenced by her father cheating on her mother in their own bed. He is destroyed here by what he did in that bed. In viewing this as a table, Bourgeois is suggesting that she would eat her father because of her anger of what he did, but also to keep him close to her and prevent him from doing any other things that would betray their family. An all around gruesome and scandalous pie" (<https://louise-bourgeois.tumblr.com/post/101728331938/destruction-of-the-father-1974-louise-bourgeois>)



Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)*, 1989–93, steel, limestone and glass, 236.2 × 210.8 × 218.4 cm, Tate

- In 1989 she began to make these enclosed structures she called *Cells*. They are used to explore her feelings about being trapped and afraid. The word 'cell' can refer both to a prison and the most basic element of an animal or plant. She said, "*Each cell deals with a fear. Fear is pain... each cell deals with the pleasure of the voyeur, the thrill of looking and being looked at*".
- This one of her first *Cells*. Inside a wire mesh cage is a large rough marble stone supported by steel girders. The stone has carved and polished black eyes that look up towards a large circular mirror. Other mirrors inside the cell look like dressing-table mirrors or oversized vanity mirrors. They suggest the idea of home. In the wire mesh ceiling the large round mirror is attached to a hinged circular panel. This can rotate to reflect different views of the interior. Walking around the sculpture is unnerving as the eyes and mirrors both confront and reflect you.

- Bourgeois wrote: "***It is the quality of your eyes and the strength of your eyes that are expressed here. Nobody is going to keep me from seeing what is instead of what I would like***". Through *Cells (Eyes and Mirrors)* Bourgeois invites us to think about reality and what reality means.

NOTES

- "Louise Bourgeois began to make her self-enclosed structures known as *Cells* in 1989 and they became an important part of her output for many years. In these works she explores themes of being trapped, anguish and fear. The word 'cell' can refer to both an enclosed room, as in a prison; as well as the most basic elements of plant or animal life, as in the cells of the body. This is how Bourgeois described how she saw the Cells: "***Each cell deals with a fear. Fear is pain... each cell deals with the pleasure of the voyeur, the thrill of looking and being looked at.***" (Tate)
- *Cell (Eyes and Mirrors)* 1989-93, one of Bourgeois's first cells, has a large rough marble stone supported by steel girders at its centre. The stone has carved and polished black eyes that look up towards a large circular mirror. Other mirrors inside the cell look like dressing-table mirrors or oversized vanity mirrors. They suggest the idea of home. In the wire mesh ceiling the large round mirror is attached to a hinged circular panel. This can rotate to reflect different views of the interior. Walking around the sculpture is unnerving as the eyes and mirrors both confront and reflect you. Bourgeois wrote: "***It is the quality of your eyes and the strength of your eyes that are expressed here. Nobody is going to keep me from seeing what is instead of what I would like***".

- Through *Cells (Eyes and Mirrors)* Bourgeois invites us to think about reality and what reality means.

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Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010), *Maman*, 1999

- The spider first appears in her work in the 1940s but she did not focus on the theme until the 1990s. For her it has positive associations as she sees the spider as a symbol of her mother. Bourgeois wrote, "*The Spider* is an ode to my mother. She was my best friend. Like a spider, my mother was a weaver. . . Like spiders, my mother was very clever. Spiders are friendly presences that eat mosquitoes. We know that mosquitoes spread diseases and are therefore unwanted. So, spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother."
- She made spiders ranging in size from a four-inch brooch to this 30-foot-tall sculpture.
- In a film made about her life called *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, The Mistress and The Tangerine* she describes the spider as her 'most successful subject'.

NOTES

- "The spider first appears in Bourgeois's work in the 1940s,

and had explicit, positive associations for the artist, who saw the spider as a symbol of her mother. Bourgeois is explicit about this connection: "*The Spider* is an ode to my mother. She was my best friend. Like a spider, my mother was a weaver. . . Like spiders, my mother was very clever. Spiders are friendly presences that eat mosquitoes. We know that mosquitoes spread diseases and are therefore unwanted. So, spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother." Bourgeois made spiders in a wide variety of media and ranging in size from a four-inch brooch to *Maman*, a sculpture over 30-foot-tall, which includes a sack containing 17 gray and white marble eggs, and is so large that it can only be installed outdoors. Though the earliest examples of spiders in Bourgeois's work are found in two drawings from 1947, she focused on the theme most consistently in the 1990s, at the end of her life, when she was no doubt consumed with memories of her mother and her childhood." (The Art Story)

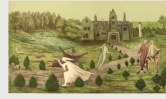
- "In a 2008 film made about her life, *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, The Mistress and The Tangerine*, Bourgeois described these spider sculptures as her 'most successful subject'. Bourgeois uses the spider, both predator (a sinister threat) and protector (an industrious repairer), to symbolise the mother figure. The spinning and weaving of the spider's web links to Bourgeois's own mother, who worked in the family's tapestry restoration business, and who encouraged Louise to participate." (Tate)

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WOMEN "SURREALISTS"

- ✦ [Leonora Carrington \(1917-2011\)](#)
- ✦ Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)
- ✦ Dorothea Tanning (1910-2012)
- ✦ Lee Miller (1907-1977)
- ✦ Dora Maar (1907-1997)
- ✦ Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010)



- **Let me end with something Frida Kahlo said but which could apply to all these women artists "They thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality."**