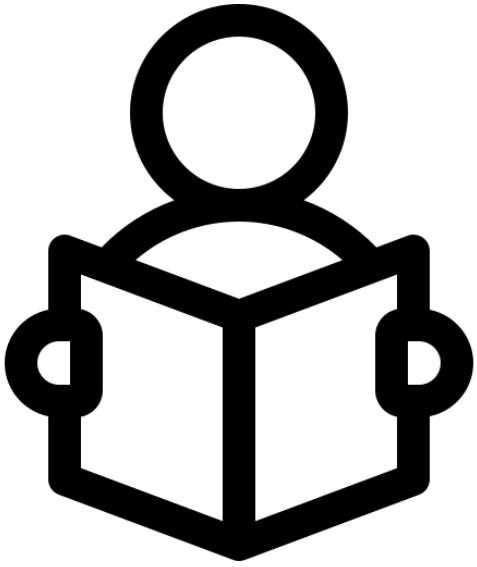
Firstsite

Leonora Carrington: Avatars & Alliances

Exhibition Highlights



Plain English Guide

Please do not remove from the gallery

About this guide

This plain English guide can be used by visitors with support needs, families, or those who speak other languages.

The guide can also be used to walk around the show.

There are 10 works to look at in this guide.

Please let us know what you think about this guide. Tell a member of staff or email info@firstsite.uk

A large print guide which contains all works can be found at the beginning of the exhibition. Or speak to a staff member wearing a Firstsite coloured ribbon worn around necks.

Introduction to Avatars & Alliances

Leonora Carrington was a British Mexican artist. She attended New Hall School in Chelmsford.

She made paintings, drawings, prints, and books. Artworks made by her can be found in this show.

Leonora explored animals, witches, landscapes, and cultures from around the world through different layers.

This was inspired by her parents being Irish and English, and was told stories about Celtic culture as a child.

Objects have been chosen to explore cultures and artefacts that Leonora was interested in. These are next to her own artworks.

1. Mindmap

The people involved in making this show made this mindmap.

It shows the different thoughts, feelings, and themes about Leonora’s work and her life.

The mind map is decorated with shapes and arrows.

Mind maps can be helpful for those who are autistic or dyslexic to learn.

2. The Hearing Trumpet

By Leonora Carrington

Leonora wrote the book ‘The Hearing Trumpet’ in 1950.

The Hearing Trumpet is described as a surrealist book.

The story follows the 92-year-old woman Marian Leatherby who is hard-of-hearing.

She is given a hearing trumpet by a friend, and hears her family is planning to put her in a home.

Marian is sent off to a home for older people by her family.

At the home Marian finds herself drawn into adventures.

3. Hazelwood Hall

By Leonora Carrington

As a child, Leonora started a diary whilst living at Hazelwood Hall. This showed her feelings and drawings.

She began drawing self-portraits and horses from riding with her mother.

The horse then became a favourite animal for her to paint in her work.

Her family homes of Crookhey Hall and Hazelwood Hall left a mark on her as a child. Carved wooden animals, plants, and surrounding fields influenced her paintings.

Leonora made this painting of her family home.

4. Hyena In Hyde Park

By Leonora Carrington

In 1934, Leonora's parents made her visit parties and events to dance and meet other people.

Hyena in Hyde Park shows a hyena watching two horses running in a park in London.

Leonora wrote a book called 'The Debutante'.

In the book, a hyena pretends to be Leonora and visits a party.

"Very early, I paid the hyena a visit. I told her, "I have to go to my ball this evening". The Debutante, 1937.

5. Four Women Asleep

By Roland Penrose

In the 1930's, Leonora had a personal relationship with the artist Max Ernst.

Leonora's father was not happy with this, and so Leonora and Max moved to Cornwall in Southwest England.

They stayed with a friend called Roland Penrose at Lambes Creek in Cornwall.

Leonora met new friends here such as the photographer Lee Miller, the artist Man Ray, and poets.

Whilst on holiday in Cornwall, they visited the countryside and swam in rivers.

Introduction To Living In Paris

After being in Cornwall, Leonora and Max moved to Paris in France.

Together they met artists who were part of the Surrealist group such as Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, Méret Oppenheim, and Leonor Fini.

Surrealist artists explored dreams and made artworks which played with our feelings of reality.

At the time there was fear around a war in Europe. This was often explored in the artist’s work.

Leonora began a friendship with Leonor due to her love of books, history, and feelings of independence.

Introduction To Living In France

With the fear of a war in Europe, Leonora and Max moved to the South of France.

They lived in a farmhouse where they made and showed various sculptures and paintings.

Some of these paintings and sculptures explored horses, mermaids, and made-up creatures.

Leonora was fascinated with blending animals and human bodies together.

Many friends visited this farmhouse including Lee Miller and Leonor Fini.

As a group, they would wear costumes, and wigs, and make performances.

6. Leonora Carrington

By Lee Miller

Lee Miller was an American photographer, artist, and fashion model.

After meeting Roland in 1937, she became a key friend in the group in Cornwall with Leonora.

It was here where Lee made photographs using a camera of her friends including Leonora.

In her photograph’s, objects appear as memories of the holidays and to act as ship figureheads or mannequins.

When Lee visited Leonora in France, she took these photos of her friends’ lives, and when the friends were playing around with costumes.

Introduction To The Spanish Hospital

At 23 years old Max was arrested by the Police because people were worried about him being German.

He was put in a prison.

This effected Leonora’s health.

In 1940, Leonora’s friends got worried and travelled with Leonora to Spain to get help.

Whilst in Madrid, Spain, Leonora was hurt by a group of soldiers, and she became more unwell.

A person who worked for the British Government who knew Leonora’s father went to help Leonora.

7. Untitled (Page from Santander Sketchbook)

By Leonora Carrington

Leonora was put in a hospital in a place called Santander.

This decision was without Leonora’s thoughts and feelings.

She was there to get help for people with mental health.

These drawings were from a book she made in the hospital.

She explored her feelings about dreams and the animals that appeared in them.

She wrote a book called Down Below about these memories.

Introduction To Gods And Monsters

While Leonora was a child she read many books.

Her home in France contained many of these fairytale books.

Some of these books contained drawings and illustrations of monsters, legends, and witches.

The character ‘Snow Queen’ written by Hans Christian Anderson was a favourite.

This figure appears in her own novel ‘The Hearing Trumpet’.

8. ‘Two Women’

By Leonor Fini

Leonor Fini and Leonora met while in Paris in France. They painted each other in their paintings, sometimes wearing armour and costumes.

Leonor Fini and Leonora’s friendship grew stronger in the summer of 1939 just before World War Two started.

Leonor stayed with Leonora in France.

When Max became a prisoner Leonora and Leonor wrote letters to each other.

They both shared a love of poems, books, and history.

Leonor was interested in Egypt and sometimes put Sphynxes, Cats, and insects in her works with people.

Introduction To Urban Underworld

In 1942, during World War Two, Mexico opened their borders to welcome refugees.

Leonora left America for Mexico in 1942, where she met the artists Remedios Varo, Kati Horna, and Frida Kahlo.

Leonora explored witchcraft with her friend Kati Horna, visiting markets in Mexico with herbal potions.

Other friends showed Leonora Mayan culture which was an ancient culture in Mexico.

Leonora’s Catholic family and Irish ancestry led her to have an interest in different cultures.

Often in her paintings and drawings she explored Heaven, Earth and the Underworld.

9. ‘Night Of The 8th’

By Leonora Carrington

Inside the painting ‘Night of the 8th’ contains a person that looks like they are doing magic.

In the paintings there are animals which look like pigs and birds flying above circles.

There is what looks like a clover plant.

Leonora may use the number 8 to explore the different seasons in the Celtic calendar.

In the calendars, there are festivals which celebrate the collecting of food and how animals are born.

Druids in Celtic culture believed in how animals are reborn.

10. ‘I Thought Evil Thoughts All The Way’

By Jessie Makinson

Gallery 3 explores the work of Jessie Makinson, who is a painter from London, UK.

Her work explores human and animal bodies, in different rooms, such as bedrooms and kitchens.

She uses lots of colours, often showing women who may look scary but are also confident.

When Jessie makes a work, she paints many layers.

She builds up characters across the top of a canvas.

She has explored how artists like Leonora Carrington and Leonor Fini use animals and humans in their paintings too.