

LEONORA CARRINGTON



From September 17 2025 to January 11 2026
At the Musée du Luxembourg
19 rue de Vaugirard 75006 Paris

Open every day from 10.30am to 7pm
Open Monday evenings until 10 pm
Closed on 1st May

PLACES AUX JEUNES !

Free admission for young people under 26 from Monday to Friday
Limited number of tickets per date, online booking required at
museeduluxembourg.fr

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THE EXHIBITION

With a singular imagination, Leonora Carrington (Clayton-le-Woods, Lancashire, 1917 – Mexico, 2011) masterfully blended art, literature, and life into a series of personal cosmologies shaped by ideas of metamorphosis, reinvention, and quest. She led a life out of step with her era: an exile, a mother, and a survivor of the violence and abuses inflicted by 20th-century psychiatry. Travel—whether literal or symbolic—holds a central place in her perception of life. France was pivotal in her artistic formation and the early stages of her career. She settled there in 1937 with Max Ernst and joined the Surrealist group. Her life's odyssey then led her to Spain, New York, and finally to Mexico—destinations where she forged a profoundly original voice in art and literature. Throughout her career, Leonora Carrington persistently delved into esoteric knowledge, forgotten beliefs, and unconventional modes of understanding that aimed to reshape women's role in history. She drew inspiration from diverse influences, including Italian Renaissance painting, Victorian literature,

BACK TO MENU



EXHIBITION MAP



medieval alchemy, and magic. This exhibition explores the recurring themes that infuse her work: trauma and introspection, family origins, uprooting, mythical female figures, ecofeminism... More than a century after her birth, Leonora Carrington stands as an indispensable lens for comprehending today's world: her enduring legacy challenges established conventions and invites us toward new readings of a life that is as deeply intimate as it is universally resonant.

Tere Arcq and Carlos Martín, Exhibition Curators

1. The beginnings of a vital grand tour

Leonora Carrington's emergence as an artist was marked by her origins in early 20th-century post-Victorian England and by an initiatory period spent in Florence in the early 1930s. From childhood, nourished by fairy tales, fantasy literature, and the tales she heard from her Irish mother, she cultivated a refined affinity for the fantastical and for crafting alternate worlds—a penchant already apparent in her childhood notebook *Animals of a Different Planet*, a remarkable

work that combines scientific curiosity and pure imagination.

After repeated expulsions from Catholic schools, the artist embarked on her Grand Tour through Italy, a kind of “failed initiation” in the Jungian sense. Though immersed in the pinnacle of art history, her creations at that time, at just fifteen years old, consisted of the Sisters of the Moon series and other watercolours, that echoed the imagery of her childhood far more than Tuscan influence: visionary and powerful women, bearers of arcane wisdom, generate an alternative cosmogony dominated by the feminine and populated by fantastic creatures that coexist with human beings. However, in these works from her early youth, her profound interests that would define her entire life are already evident: sorority, narrative imagination, literary depth, the invention of mythologies, and certain esoteric aspects such as astrology through tarot.

2. The Bride of the Wind.

A transnational journey through Surrealism

In the prologue he wrote for one of Carrington's stories, Max Ernst—her partner during her Surrealist period—described Leonora as the “Bride of the Wind.” Marked by the Surrealist Exhibition in London and her encounter with Ernst, Carrington began her artistic journey in 1936. Against the wishes of her father, the couple found refuge in Paris, then in the isolated village of Saint-Martin-d'Ardèche. There, they created a house—a “total work of art” that integrated daily life, painting, sculpture, and literature. Carrington exercised her imagination on the doors and windows, while Ernst adorned the exterior with various creatures, lending a symbolic dimension to the entire house. The space they created together became the cradle of a singular artistic creativity and literary voice. Perfectly bilingual, Carrington wrote—in French—her first literary works in this house, such as *The Oval Lady* or *The House of Fear*.

This period ended abruptly with the Second World War: Ernst was arrested as an “enemy alien,” and their



paths diverged. Carrington was devastated and fled to Spain in 1940. Victim of a gang rape in Madrid, she was interned in a sanatorium in Santander, where she endured a harsh regimen. This extreme experience, lived between lucidity and madness, profoundly marked her work, which became darker and more hermetic. A few years later, Carrington would revisit these events in a poignant text titled *Down Below*. In 1941, she found refuge in New York, where she rejoined the exiled Surrealist community and deepened the iconography she had developed in Europe, lending it greater complexity as if to overcome her own trauma. Shaped by the experience of exile and uprooting, the works from this period reflect the traces of war, illness, and loss.

3. Expatriation

Memory of Origins, Nostalgia for the Shores

In 1942, Leonora Carrington settled in Mexico, the country that would become her lifelong home, where she joined a vibrant community of European exiles. In the second half of the 1940s, her painting underwent a profound transformation after several life events, in particular the creation of a home and, above all, motherhood. Images of her childhood home resurfaced, conjuring ghostly apparitions and dark memories. Yet motherhood also ignited a fervent creative surge: her longing for England and reconnection with her roots manifested in family scenes, pastorals, and dreamlike images. The works of this era vividly reflect the influence of Italian painting—through the use of tempera (a water-based painting technique in which pigments are bound by a soluble binder, usually egg-based), painting on wood panels or compressed board, and an interest in the predella format (the lower part of altarpieces, whose horizontal format allows for creating narrative scenes)—and differ significantly from her New

York works. At times adopting the form of a sacra conversazione, a typical Renaissance composition featuring sacred figures in a serene, harmonious, and subtly enigmatic dialogue, these canvases are imbued with a softened melancholy, less convulsive and more introspective. In 1948, Carrington presented her first solo exhibition at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York, with the support of her friend and patron Edward James, who highlighted the complexity and dreamlike power of her work: "Her paintings are not literary; they are images distilled in the underground caverns of the libido, vertiginously sublimated. They belong primarily to the universal unconscious."

4. The Heroine's Journey

The title of this section is borrowed from Joseph Campbell, a mythologist admired by Leonora Carrington, famous for imagining "the Hero's Journey," a narrative structure inspired by the works of Carl Gustav Jung. When the psyche dissolves, the individual needs to find a new path. They must embark on a heroic journey, a quest toward the awakening of their consciousness. The selection of works proposes

a reading of Carrington's oeuvre as a feminine transcript of the "hero's journey." As her son Gabriel notes, she was "always in search of inner maps to help her navigate her own visionary life and inner demons." Her roadmap was a rich and complex cartography of myths, as well as mystical and spiritual traditions encompassing both ancient and contemporary teachings. Carrington was interested in historical and mythological figures from diverse cultures, such as Hermes, Moses, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Buddha. In the course of her quest, she immersed herself in the study of mystical currents in religions, like Gnosticism and Kabbalah. In Mexico, she met disciples of the Russian Piotr Ouspensky and the Armenian Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff, whose teachings on the evolution of consciousness influenced her work. From her youth, she had discovered the teachings of Buddhism, a spiritual path that holds enormous respect for all forms of life. This perspective was perhaps, throughout her life, the most influential and consistent driving force in her work.

5. Luminous Darkness

André Breton, the “pope” of Surrealism described Leonora Carrington as an “enchanteress [...] with a velvety, mocking gaze.” This formula alludes to the interest and fascination with occultism that Carrington shared with other Surrealists. They indeed rediscovered magic, the tarot, alchemy, astrology, spiritualism, and other esoteric traditions from antiquity that were once reserved for initiates. The title of the section is taken from the writings of Joseph Campbell, who draws an analogy between initiation into occultism and “the dark night of the soul that comes just before revelation.”

Until recently, this aspect has been relatively underexplored, in part because Carrington created a unique and complex language but refused to explain or clarify her multiple influences. Carrington’s mysterious ways are unsurprising, given that most esoteric pathways not only require secrecy, but their very nature also resists easy categorization and representation. Carrington was fully aware of this and carefully embedded incantations, cabalistic

signs, diagrams, and other magical symbols within her compositions, often effectively obscuring their purpose and meaning behind playful narratives designed to confound those unfamiliar with these traditions.

6. The Alchemical Kitchen

Inspired by a term coined by Susan Aberth, this section examines how Carrington incorporated various magical traditions into her work, using arcane symbolism and pictorializing complex notions of temporal and spatial alterations that occur around the “Alchemical Kitchen.” Cooking becomes a metaphor for hermetic operations, and the kitchen—traditionally connected to female labour and restrictions—serves as a space where women can reclaim their power through alchemy, magic, and witchcraft. Carrington’s deep engagement with alchemy is evident not only in the iconography of many of her works but also in her technique. In the mid-1940s, for instance, she began experimenting with the medieval technique of egg tempera, which allowed her to achieve rich, shimmering tones. Drawing a connection between



cooking and magic, her patron, Edward James, aptly described her paintings as “not merely painted, they are brewed. They sometimes seem to have materialized in a cauldron at the stroke of midnight.” In Mexico, Carrington’s interest in cooking, which began during her idyllic times at Saint Martin d’Ardèche, was enriched after she discovered fascinating new ingredients for food preparation, as well as the variety of herbs and plants found at the Sonora Witch’s Market for spells and potions. The settings for these alchemical experiments range from a typical kitchen in Puebla, filled with magic symbols, to Celtic rituals in the forest in honour of the great Goddess.

Curatorship

Tere Arcq

Art historian, specialist in Mexican surrealism, former chief curator of the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City and author of numerous exhibitions and publications on surrealist women

Carlos Martín

Art historian, specialist in modern art and surrealism, former chief curator of the Fundación Mapfre (Madrid)

Scenography

Véronique Dollfus

Signage

Atelier JBL - Claire Boitel

Lighting

Abraxas Concepts

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SÉNAT

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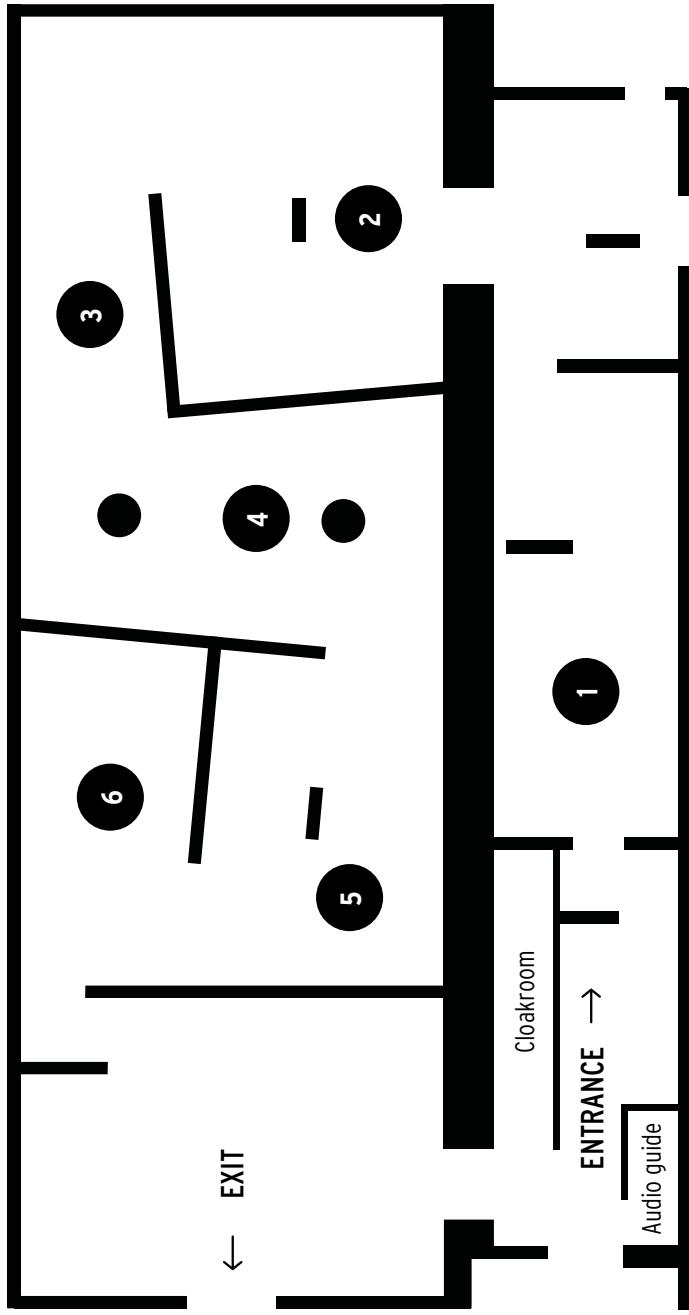
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Exhibition Map

BACK TO MENU



● The Grand Tour ● The Bride of the Wind ● Expatriation ● The Heroine's Journey

● Luminous Darkness ● The Alchemical Kitchen

LECTURE SERIES

(held in French)

At the Palais du Luxembourg, Salle Médicis, entrance via 15 ter rue de Vaugirard.

Advance booking required, free of charge up to 3 working days before the event at www.museeduluxembourg.fr.

Lectures available online on the museum's website.

Introductory Lecture

Thursday, February 19 at 6:30 p.m

With Tere Arcq, art historian, specialised in Surrealism in Mexico, and author of numerous exhibitions and publications on women Surrealists, and Carlos Martín, art historian, specialist in modern art and Surrealism, former curator at Fundación Mapfre (Madrid)

The curators introduce an exhibition devoted to Leonora Carrington. Conceived as a journey through the artist's life, they reveal how her geographic displacements, from England to Mexico, via France, Spain, and New York, also reflect an inner journey.

Surrealism in Exile : the Diaspora in Mexico

Monday, March 23 at 6:30 p.m

With Fabrice Flahutez, Professor at Jean Monnet University and member of the Institut Universitaire de France.

War forced many Surrealists into exile as early as 1939. While many of them chose the United States, we tend to forget that another welcoming land offered refuge to those whom the Vichy regime considered undesirable: Mexico. This generous land became home to a diaspora of poets and artists who would write an essential chapter of the historical narrative we know today. Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Benjamin Péret, and many others who settled in New York were at the heart of one of the greatest cultural transfers of the 20th century.

Leonora Carrington's Writings: A Cathartic Odyssey

Friday, May 29 at 6:30 p.m

With Karla Segura Pantoja, researcher, essayist, and translator

This lecture offers an in-depth exploration of Leonora Carrington's literary work—short stories, narratives, and plays written between the 1930s and the 2000s. A total artist, Carrington unfolds a boundless imagination nourished by magic, dark humour, and metamorphosis. Writing in English, French, and Spanish, Carrington opens passages to inner realities where social critique intertwines with personal mythology. Her texts, long unpublished or scattered in various locations, reveal an extraordinary creator endowed with fierce wisdom.

Leaving the forest, rekindling life

Thursday 11 June at 6.30pm

With Marie-Paule Berranger, professor emeritus of 20th-century French literature at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University

Woman, poet and surrealist: three reasons to break free from what weighs us down and holds us back, three paths open to rebellion and subversion, but also three obstacles to wider acceptance. We will meet these poets and artists who, at very different moments in 20th-century history, entered the world of surrealism. Why did they remain 'hidden in the forest' for so long? How do they embody today 'the insistent desire to see the horizon expand,' to quote Annie Le Brun?

EVENTS

Writing Workshops: Carringtonian Stories

Mondays, March 16, April 13, and May 11 at 6:30 p.m.

From age 16. Duration: 2 hours. Saturday, May 23 at 2:30 p.m. From age 10

With Affixe, take a break from the ordinary and rational while you write, blurring the lines between reality and the absurd. In the footsteps of Leonora Carrington, give life to strange and disconcerting fantasies—a surrealist experience!

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Quiet Hours

Saturdays, March 21, April 18, May 23, and June 20 at 9:30 a.m. Reservation required: museeduluxembourg.fr

Dedicated time slots to visitors on the autism spectrum and their companions, allowing them to enjoy an autonomous visit in a calm and peaceful setting, with a limited number of visitors.

Sketchbook Evening

Thursday 18th June from 7-9 p.m. Reservation required.
Free for under 26; €11 for older visitors

Have you ever dreamed of coming face to face with the works of Leonora Carrington? Whether you are a beginner or an experienced artist, bring your own materials and join this special evening to sketch the figures inhabiting the artist's universe or to draw inspiration from them in complete freedom.

Magical Weekend

May 23-24.

Affixe Family Workshop (from age 10), Saturday, May 23 at 2:30 p.m. Reservation required

European Night of Museums, Saturday, May 23 from 7:30 p.m. to midnight (last entry at 11:30 p.m.). No reservation required. Free admission, subject to availability

Book signing by illustrator Florence Magnin, Sunday, May 24 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m

Free admission with the exhibition ticket

A leading figure in French fantasy, role-playing game illustrator and graphic novelist Florence Magnin

created the Tarot d'Ambre in the early 1990s based on Roger Zelazny's universe. In the spirit of Leonora Carrington's tarot, explore her work and meet her during this special book signing in the intimate setting of the museum's reception room.

European Night of Museums

Saturday, May 23 from 7:30 p.m. to midnight (last entry at 11:30 p.m). Free admission, subject to availability

For this special occasion, Franco-Mexican dancers and choreographers Paulina Ruiz Carballido and Stéphanie Janaina will offer performances featuring “ironic witchcraft” in dialogue with Leonora Carrington’s universe throughout the evening. Combining dance and song in Tu'un Savi (Mixtec), these creations will offer a glimpse into the rich cultural cosmology of Mexico.

MEDIATION

Reservation recommended on museeduluxembourg.fr

General Guided Tour

Guided tours in English on Saturdays: March 14, April 11, May 9, and June 13 at 10:30 a.m. Duration: 1 hour 15 minutes. From age 13

Enjoy a guided tour of this exhibition, designed as a journey through the life and imagination of Leonora Carrington, an artist whose universe was both deeply personal and nourished by rich and varied influences. A museum lecturer will reveal the surrealist, esoteric, and feminist motifs that structure her work.

Family Tour

Duration: 1 hour. From age 6

Guided by a museum lecturer, you and your family will be taken on a journey of discovery through the surprising and whimsical world of Leonora Carrington. With their wealth of unusual details and fantastical

creatures, horses, and strange concoctions, these works will undoubtedly capture the imagination of children and their parents alike!

Children's Workshops: In Leonora's Land

Sunday, March 29; Monday, April 6; Monday 20 and Thursday 23 April; Monday May 25 at 2:30 p.m. Duration: 2 hours. From age 6

After discovering Leonora Carrington's world, children are invited to explore it further in a workshop, drawing on their own dream images and the painter's enigmatic characters. They create three formats, in the manner of a triptych, into which the character can be inserted to experience a mysterious and colourful adventure.

School Visits

Introduce your classes to Leonora Carrington's extraordinary life and singular works. Her varied inspirations—from the Italian Renaissance to

Surrealism and mythologies from all over the world—offer many ways to explore this rich and mysterious universe.

Visits for Ages 3-5: Suitcase Visit

Saturdays, March 21, April 18, May 23, and June 20 at 9:45 a.m. Duration: 30 minutes

What was in the suitcase Leonora Carrington carried when she crossed the English Channel and later the Atlantic Ocean? Through a short story centred on the theme of travel, children discover the artist's life and the motifs shaping her universe.

RESOURCES

Activity booklet

From age 7, distributed free at the museum entrance

Children's trail

For this exhibition, young visitors are invited to discover some of the most significant works with labels written especially for them! As part of a partnership with the Littré school (6th arrondissement), children from different classes studied the works that interested them most. These short explanatory texts based on their perceptions were written "at a child's eye level."

Audio guide

Enjoy commentary on the exhibition's major works.
Adult tours available in 5 languages (French, English, German, Spanish, Italian)
Children's tour (French)

Free thematic tour (French & English) on the mobile app.

Price: €5

GrandPalais+ price: €4

Download via the app: €3.49

Musical walk

This piece created by experimental musicians Feronia Wennborg and Lucy Duncombe combines vocals and technology to echo the freedom with which Carrington moved from one art form to another.

An original creation for the Tsuku Boshi label

The walks are available free of charge on the mobile app and on the Musée du Luxembourg website.

Teaching pack

Available online

Photo booth

In the exhibition hall



THE FREE MUSÉE DU LUXEMBOURG MOBILE APP

The Musée du Luxembourg offers a free mobile app available from Apple and Google stores. An essential tool for practical information, keeping up to date with the latest news, planning your visit, and getting the most out of the museum's exhibitions and events: room-by-room tours, themed tours based on five works in the exhibition (free in French and English), and a musical tour.

You can also find paid audio guides for adults and children for €3.49.

Download the app: <https://tinyurl.com/luxappli>



MUSEEDULUXEMBOURG.FR

A full program of events and practical information to prepare your visit. Find articles on major themes of the exhibition, artwork spotlights, and a wide range of videos, audio, and playful activities for all audiences.

PREPARE YOUR VISIT

Find more texts, videos, and resources online at museeduluxembourg.fr.

SHARE YOUR VISIT!

#ExpoCarrington #MuseeduLuxembourg

PUBLICATIONS

Exhibition catalogue

21,5 x 28 cm, 208 pages, 160 illustrations

€45

Exhibition booklet

Co-published by Découvertes Gallimard /
GrandPalaisRmn Éditions, 2026, 12 x 17 cm, 64 pages,
30 illustrations

€11,50

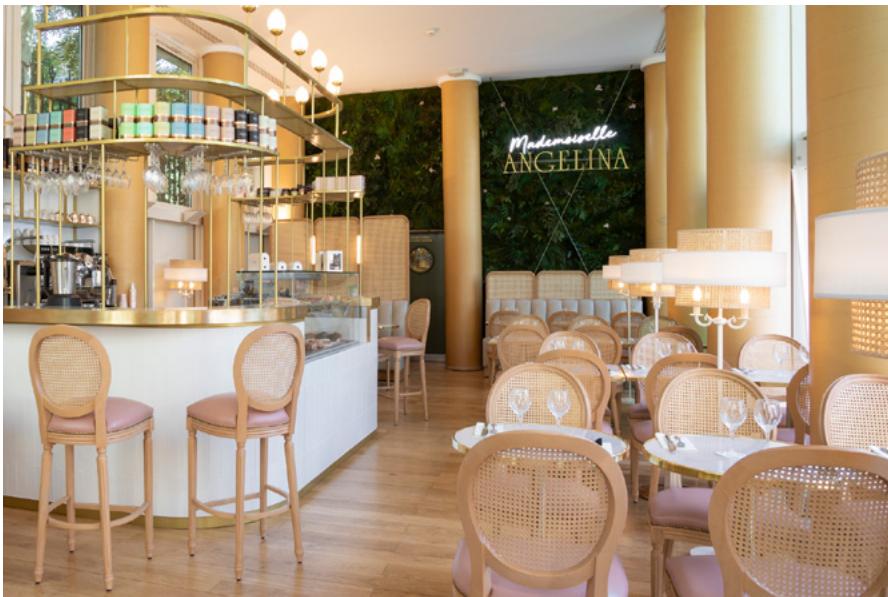
Exhibition journal

28 x 43 cm, 24 pages, 40 illustrations,

€7

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Mademoiselle ANGELINA

Located in the heart of the museum, the Mademoiselle Angelina tea room offers an exclusive menu designed to be a sensory and gustatory extension of the exhibition. Discover the 'Leonora' dish, semi-cooked tuna with pepper, served with a creamy corn duo, as well as a gourmet creation combining a base of chopped cocoa, chocolate mousse and pistachio cream.

Opening hours:

The Mademoiselle Angelina tea room is open during the same hours as the museum.
Enjoy the terrace on sunny days.