

# 10

## Private Worlds and Public Myths

UNDER THE pretence of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that rightly or wrongly may be called superstition or fancy.' In this way André Breton concluded his attack on the 'reign of logic' in the first *Surrealist Manifesto*, preparatory to arguing that, following the discoveries of Freud, the imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contains within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them . . .<sup>1</sup> These 'strange forces' are no less 'real' than those that govern our more workaday conscious life, and it was for this reason, rather than because of any fantasy *per se* in them, that the Surrealists put such faith in dreams, and in all other expressions of the human experience and imagination which are not conditioned by the narrow confines of logic. 'Fear, the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for things extravagant. . . . There are fairy tales to be written for adults, fairy tales still almost raw.'<sup>2</sup>

The Surrealists understood the 'freedom of the imagination' in terms of the Romantic tradition, which distinguished between the imagination and fantasy, the former remaining essentially linked to reality, the latter over riding it. In the face of the disbelief of their critics, the Surrealists held to the necessary relation between art and life – Surrealism 'plunges its roots in life'. They did not, in other words, subscribe to the idea of art for art's sake, to the self-referential artistic tradition of Europe. It is true that in speaking up for the rights of the imagination Surrealism sometimes stated its case in ways that laid the movement open to an identification with the fantastic; the theatrical academicism of some later surrealist art has strengthened this identification and worked to undermine its true position. Reality was always an essential term in the surrealist equation, however, and it was never Surrealism's intention to seal off the imagination from that reality, desire from action, the unconscious from the conscious, the marvellous from the everyday world, dream from waking life.

But the rationalism of Europeans, Gabriel García Márquez remarked,

prevents them seeing that reality isn't limited to the price of tomatoes and eggs. Everyday life in Latin America proves that reality is full of the most extraordinary things. To make this point I usually cite the case of the American explorer . . . who

10.1 Detail of Pl. 10.45.

10.3 Rufino Tamayo, *Woman in Grey*, 1959, oil on canvas, 195×129.5 cm., Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

10.2 Rufino Tamayo, *Girl Attacked by a Strange Bird*, 1947, oil on canvas, 177.8×127.3 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Mr and Mrs Charles Zadok, 1955.



made an incredible journey through the Amazon jungle at the end of the last century and saw, among other things, a river with boiling water, and a place where the sound of the human voice brought on torrential rain. In Comodoro Rivadavia, in the extreme south of Argentina, winds from the South Pole swept a whole circus away and the next day fishermen caught the bodies of lions and giraffes in their nets . . .<sup>3</sup>

In Latin America, the Surrealists came to feel, the imagination possessed a vitality, and art and poetry a meaning, lacking in the constricted civilization of the West. 'In Mexico', Breton wrote, ' . . . artistic creation is not adulterated as it is here.'<sup>4</sup> Art there was not cut off from its roots in the world of magic, and popular art was very much alive and its value recognized by artists. And not only was the ethnographic reality of indigenous life strongly present in the continent still, with its myth and ritual, cosmologies and cosmogonies embodied in painted pots, in weavings, in carvings and in the masks collected by the Surrealists, but a belief in magic was present at all levels of society: 'a world of omens, premonitions, cures and superstitions that is authentically ours, truly Latin American'.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter is therefore predominantly concerned with the currents in Latin American art that seemed to the Surrealists to possess those qualities in which they yearned to recognize their own ideas. It is concerned both with the private worlds of the imagination and with wider networks of belief such as the *santería* or voodoo of the African Caribbean and of Brazil. It also includes the work of artists who chose to settle in Latin America, among them Remedios Varo, whose husband the surrealist poet Benjamin Péret spent many years in Mexico, Wolfgang Paalen and Leonora Carrington; and of Latin American artists who joined the Surrealist movement, most notably Wifredo Lam and Roberto Matta Echaurren. The intention is to present, rather than homogeneity, elements of contrast and comparison.

Surrealism's interest in and experience of Latin America was initially concentrated in Mexico, which Breton visited in 1938. In his introduction to the work of Frida Kahlo, he wrote:

There is a country . . . where creation has been prodigal with undulations of the ground and species of plant life, and has surpassed itself with its range of seasons and cloud architectures; where, for a whole century now, the word INDEPENDENCE has continued to crackle beneath a blacksmith's giant bellows, sending up incomparable sparks into the sky. I had long been impatient to go there, to put to the test the idea I had formulated of the kind of art our own era demanded, an art that would deliberately sacrifice the external model to the internal model, that would resolutely give perception precedence over representation.<sup>6</sup>



The rejection of the 'external model', and the Surrealists' position to the 'desire to subordinate painting to social action' to turn their attention away from the most famous Mexican artist of the time, the first generation of muralists. Breton wrote approvingly of Rufino Tamayo's own comments on his disillusion with muralism and with a nationalism (to which Surrealism was always resistant) which had led the muralists 'to neglect the problems of plasticity and degenerate into the picturesque'. Breton saw Tamayo's work as governed by two necessities: on the one hand, the 'need to reopen the lines of communication which painting, as a universal language, should be providing between the continents', and on the other 'to extract the essence of eternal Mexico'. He praises Tamayo's free morphology, which has nothing to do with distortion for expressionist ends, but rather with a lyrical imagination by which a child can assume the dimensions of his mother's heart, and which uses the rich colours of pre-Columbian codices. [Pls 10.2,3]

However, Breton also recognized that much of the muralist work had little to do with social realism in the sense in which it was understood in Europe, and that there were strong connections above all in the frescos of Diego Rivera, with popular art. In his 'Souvenir du Mexique', he addressed Rivera:

you have the advantage over all of us of participating in a popular tradition which to my knowledge remains alive on the soil of your country. That innate sense of poetry and of art as a mystery should be, as they must be made by all, for all, and whose secret we desperately seek in Europe – one only has to see the caress a tarascan idol, or smile, with that grave, matchless smile at the extraordinary arrangement of a market display, to know that it can never let you down. It is clear that you are linked by millennial roots to the spiritual resources of that earth which are yours, as it is to me, the dearest in the world. . . . it is that which plastically allows you to find your measure in any kind of object, and to treat history as the ancient anatomists treated man: your gigantic ever-open atlas on the inner walls of the buildings of Mexico City, of Cuernavaca, of Chapingo, I've been able to follow with the wondering eyes of childhood the concrete progression of man in time . . .<sup>8</sup>

Mexican popular art featured strongly among the works illustrating 'Souvenir du Mexique': the anonymous painting *Esta es mi Vida* [Pl. 3.98], a Posada print of Zapata, photographs by the Belgian Surrealist Raoul Ubac of Day of the Dead objects – a skull, a clay *calavera*. There were also photographs by Manuel Alvarez Bravo [Pls 10.4–13], whom Breton valued highly, whose 'very great art', in Breton's words, touches the opposite poles of life and death and in some sense reconciles them – as Breton, Mexico itself did: the marguerites blooming on an Inca grave, the perfectly balanced construction of the photograph of the coffin maker's, *Ladder of Ladders* [Pl. 10.4], where all the coffin

10.4 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *Ladder of Ladders*, 1931, silver gelatin print, 25.5×20 cm., Collection Manuel Alvarez Bravo.





10.5 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *Chalma Cross*, 1942, silver gelatin print, image 24×17.3 cm., The Minneapolis Institute of Arts; Gift of Martin Sklar.



10.6 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *The Over-prudent Washerwomen*, 1932, silver gelatin print, 25.5×20 cm., Collection Manuel Alvarez Bravo.

10.7 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *Public Thirst*, 1934, silver gelatin print, 25.5×20 cm., The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



10.8 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *The Dancers' Daughter*, 1933-4, silver gelatin print, 25.5×20 cm., Collection Manuel Alvarez Bravo.





10.9 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *'Parábola Optica'*, 1940(?), silver gelatin print, 25.5×20cm., The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



10.10 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *Wooden Horse*, silver gelatin print, 25.5×20cm., Collection Manuel Alvarez Bravo.

10.11 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *The Dreamer*, 1931, silver gelatin print, 20×25.5cm., Collection Manuel Alvarez Bravo.



10.12 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *Mannequins Laughing*, 1930, silver gelatin print, 20×25.5cm., Collection Manuel Alvarez Bravo.





those of children; the photograph of the dead striker in Tehuantepec [PL 10.13], lying above the centre of the image rather than below our gaze, blood like gleaming ritual paint on his face.

For art thus to be able to present the problems of social injustice (infant mortality rising to 75 per cent) and violence, without losing its special visual quality – to use the ‘imagination as an instrument to create reality’,<sup>9</sup> rather than replace it, was what made its condition in Mexico unique.

Neither Alvarez Bravo, nor Frida Kahlo, the artists whose work Breton most admired in Mexico, thought of themselves as Surrealists; there is no doubt, however, that their recognition by Surrealism added a dimension to that movement that was quite new. Both were prominently included in the *Exposición Internacional del Surrealismo*, which took place at the *Galería de Arte Mexicano* in January and February 1940. The exhibition was organized by Wolfgang Paalen, who had moved to Mexico in 1939, with the collaboration of Breton and the Peruvian poet César Moro. The cover of

10.13 Manuel Alvarez Bravo, *Striking Worker Murdered*, 1934, silver gelatin print, 20×25.5 cm., The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



10.14 Diego Rivera, *Landscape with Cacti*, 1931, oil on canvas, 125.5x150 cm., Collection Jacques and Natasha Gelman.

10.15 Carlos Mérida, *Variations on the Theme of Love (Variation 2, Ecstasy of a Virgin)*, 1939, gouache and pencil on paper, 47x57.2 cm., Mary Anne Martin/Fine Art, New York.



10.16 Guillermo Meza, *Polyphemus*, 1941, pen and ink on paper, 50.2x65.5 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Inter-American Fund.



## PRIVATE WORLDS AND PUBLIC MYTHS

the catalogue was a photograph by Alvarez Bravo, and a wide selection of works by surrealist artists was brought together, although transport difficulties because of the war reduced the number of sculptures available by Arp, Giacometti, Moore, Picasso and Ernst. Included in the general catalogue, which did not distinguish the artists' country of origin, were Kahlo (who showed two recent paintings, the large *The Two Fridas* and the now lost *Wounded Table*), Rivera, Matta, César Moro and Alvarez Bravo. In a separate section, however, was a group of 'Painters of Mexico', including some of those whom Breton had mentioned favourably after his 1938 visit, but who were presumably not considered part of the movement: Agustín Lazo, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, Carlos Mérida, Guillermo Meza, Moreno Villa, Roberto Montenegro, Antonio Ruiz and Xavier Villarútia [Pls 10.15-20]. Also in the exhibition were examples of ancient Mexican art, in the form of Colima pottery, and dance masks from Guerrero and Guadalajara, all from Rivera's own collection. Fewer 'objets surréalistes' were included than the organizers would have wished, but these did include Paalen's *Genius of the Species*.

It is not surprising that Kahlo's painting made an impact on those







10.18 Agustín Lazo, *Interrupted Execution*, n.d., ink and watercolour on paper, 24x35 cm., Collection Mariana Perez Amor.

10.17 Carlos Mérida, *Plastic Invention on the Theme of Love*, 1939, casein and watercolour on paper, 74.7x55.3 cm., The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Katharine Kuh, 1955.



10.19 Agustín Lazo, *Reclining Woman in a Landscape*, n.d., on paper, 22.2x30 cm., Collection Luis Felipe del Valle Prieto.

10.20 Antonio Ruiz, *The Dream of Malinche*, 1939, oil on canvas, 30x40 cm., Collection Mariana Perez Amor.





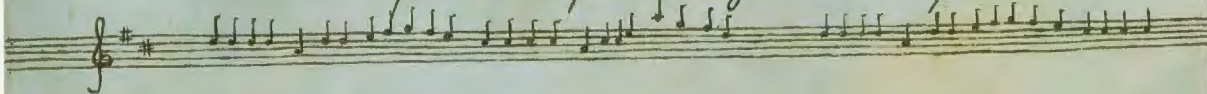
10.21 Frida Kahlo, *My Grandparents, My Parents and I (Family Tree)*, 1936, oil and tempera on metal panel, 30.7×34.5 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Allan Roos, M.D., and B. Mathieu Roos, 1976.

10.22 Frida Kahlo, *Self-portrait with Cropped Hair*, 1940, oil on canvas, 40×27.9 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., 1943.

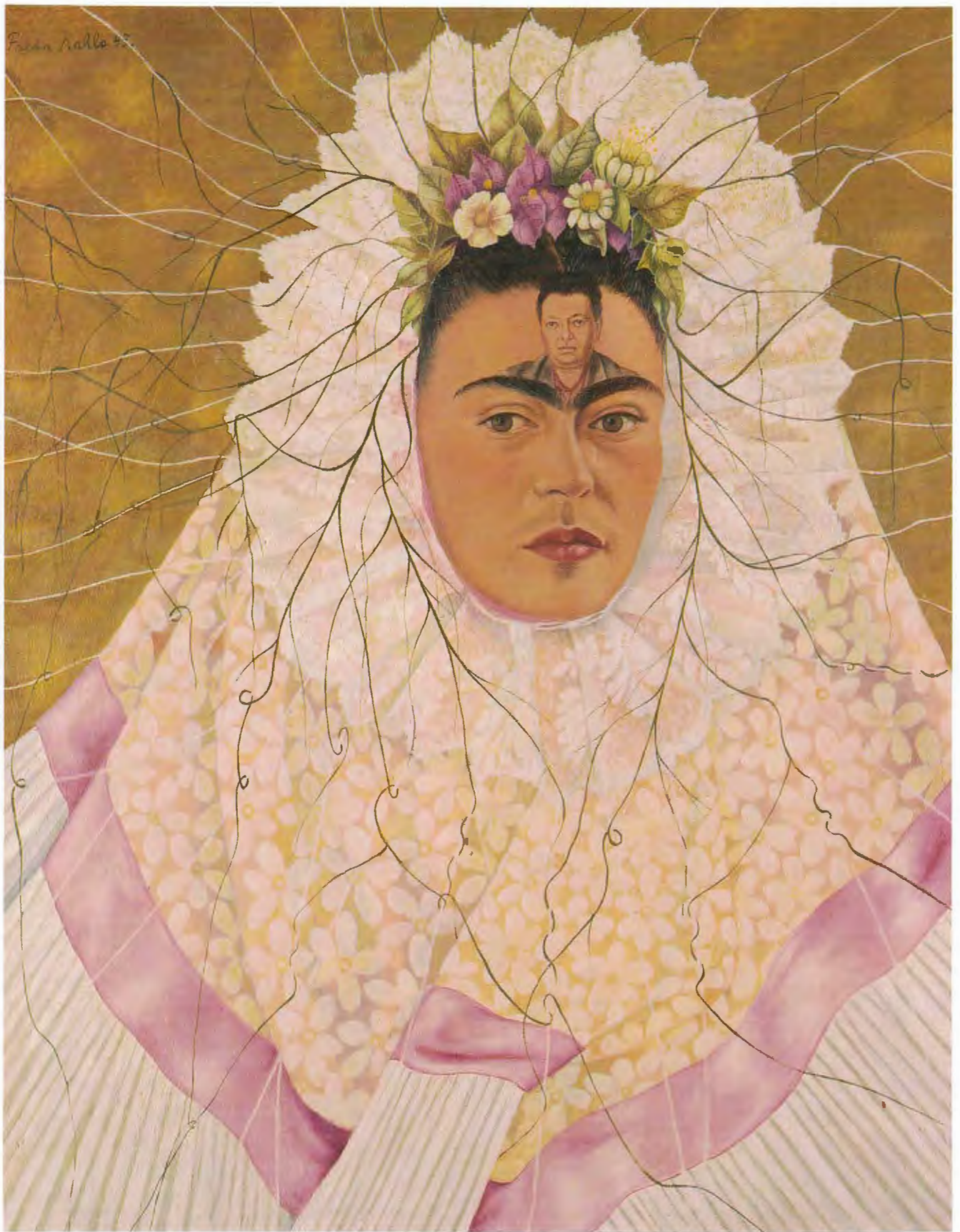
Europeans who saw it, rooted as it is in Mexico, but at the same time opening out imaginatively into a wider signification, poised 'at the point of intersection between the political (philosophical) line and the artistic line'. 'My surprise and joy', Breton wrote of Kahlo, 'was unbounded when I discovered, on my arrival in Mexico, that her work has blossomed forth, in her latest paintings into pure surreality, despite the fact that it had been conceived without any prior knowledge whatsoever of the ideas motivating the activities of my friends and myself'<sup>10</sup> [Pls 10.21-25].

Kahlo's painting was consciously rooted in the *retablo*, or ex-voto – the simple rudimentary image, with an inscription below giving details of the miraculous event in which a particular virgin or saint

Mira que si te quise, fué por el pelo,  
Ahora que estás pelona, ya no te quiero.



1940. Frida Kahlo.



PRIVATE WORLDS AND PUBLIC MYTHS

had interceded. The walls of the stairwells in Kahlo's house in Coyoacán are covered with such little paintings, usually anonymous. Kahlo, however, subverts the *retablo's* function; in works like *My Birth*, or *The Suicide of Dorothy Hale*, it is the absence of miraculous intervention that is presented. In *My Birth*, the space normally reserved for an inscription, the panel at the bottom, is left blank, and in place of the normal devotional image, on the wall behind the bed is the Mater Dolorosa, the Virgin of Sorrows. This is one of the paintings in which Kahlo refers most directly to her own disastrous experience. Injured in an accident when she was fifteen, and unable to bear children though constantly wishing to, she was always in pain and underwent innumerable operations. The *retablo* is both a private act and a commonly shared tradition, and Kahlo's frequent adoption of the form points to the situation of her art on the borderline between public and private worlds.

Kahlo's subject was, more often than not, herself. Self-portraits show her dressed in a variety of beautiful Tehuantepec costumes, wearing her extraordinary jewellery, with tropical fruit or flowers, or with a pet monkey, on display. In one fine pencil self-portrait, her heavy dark brows are also a bird – a transformation that directly echoes the snake-surrounded eyes of the Aztec rain deity Tlaloc. Sometimes she depicts herself as a child, as in *My Grandparents, My Parents and I* [Pl. 10.21], in which her own mestizo origins are examined. The self-portraits probe the question of identity, personal, cultural and political. In the *Self-Portrait with Portrait of Doctor Farrill* [Pl. 10.24], she shows herself disabled, in her wheelchair, with the dominating image of her male doctor, just finished, and painted as it were with her own blood – the palette is of veins rather than pigments. It is with metaphors of this kind that Kahlo touches the surrealist concept of the poetic image.

The 'drop of cruelty and humour' Breton spoke of as characteristic of her work is clear in the *Self-Portrait* of 1932, which contains an ironic commentary on the issues of identity. Kahlo was at this time in the USA with her husband, Diego Rivera, who, having completed the mural *An Allegory of California* for the Pacific Stock Exchange, was starting his major commission for the Detroit Institute of Arts, the *Detroit Industry* panels revelling in the might of modern machinery [Pl. 7.13]. In her tiny picture, Kahlo paints herself as a pretty mechanical doll, on a little motorized pedestal, usually holding the Mexican flag in one hand and a cigarette in the other. Behind her are two equally forbidding landscapes – Mexico, with its ancient idols and mythologies, and the United States with its regimented factories belching smoke. Rich and complex as this picture is, at one level it is an extremely witty exchange with Rivera, and a commentary on his allegorical style and his favourite themes.

In the late Thirties, the Surrealists increasingly turned their attention to magic and 'primitive' religion, and here their experiences in Latin America were of special value. The first Surrealist exhibition



10.24 Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Portrait of Doctor Farrill*, 1951, oil on masonite, 41.5×50 cm., Private Collection.

10.23 (facing page) Frida Kahlo, *Diego on my Mind*, 1943, oil on canvas, 96.5×81 cm., Collection Jacques and Natasha Gelman.

10.24a Frida Kahlo *Self-Portrait*, 1932, Private Collection.



10.25 Frida Kahlo, *The Fruits of the Earth*, 1938, oil on masonite, 40×60 cm., Collection Banco Nacional de México, s.n.c., Mexico City.





10.26 María Izquierdo, *Adornments*, c. 1941, oil on canvas, 70×100 cm., Collection Banco Nacional de México, s.n.c., Mexico City.

10.27 Hector Hyppolite working on *Agoué and his Consort*, Jason Seley Archives, Cornell University.



in Paris after the war, in 1947, included a 'room of superstition', and a series of 'altars'. The first plate in the catalogue of this exhibition was a painting by the Haitian Hector Hyppolite (*Papa Lauco*).

Breton had visited Haiti on his way back to France from the USA in 1945.<sup>11</sup> He gave a series of lectures in December, the first of which, at the Rex Cinema, had 'an overwhelming effect on the disaffected youth . . .'.<sup>12</sup> In Port-au-Prince, Breton came across the paintings of Hyppolite at the Art Centre, run by the American diplomat Witt Peters, who kept an open studio for artists and hung their work, which was already finding a market in the States. The virtue of the Centre, Breton considered, 'in terms of the encouragement and support it offered to potential artists far outweighed the rather tiresome commercial aspect.'<sup>13</sup> Hyppolite's paintings, in Breton's view, surpassed the others on display, because, raw and unschooled as they were, they had the 'stamp of total authenticity . . . the only ones to convey the unmistakable impression that the artist who had created them had an important message to communicate, that he was the guardian of a secret' [Pls 10.27,28].

While studying Hyppolite's development, Breton learned that he had been initiated as a voodoo priest, and wrote that his painting

PRIVATE WORLDS AND PUBLIC MYTHS

ere the first record of actual voodoo ceremonies and divinities  
 hich Breton, through his friend Pierre Mabile, had attended).  
 herto, colour prints of Christian saints had served the devotees  
 this syncretic religion, 'for the excellent reason that Erzalie Freda  
 homey, the goddess of love, is at present adored by the faithful  
 der the guise of St. Anthony of Padua; Ogoun Ferraille, the god  
 War under the guise of St. James the Greater because the latter is  
 ten represented in popular art, wearing a sword . . .'.<sup>14</sup> In his  
 goun Ferraille, Hyppolite includes the divinity himself, the para-  
 ernalia that accompanies his ritual, and the geometric signs and  
 mbols that are drawn on a wall or sprinkled on the ground with  
 our or sand, and are possibly of Caribbean Indian origin [Pl  
 31].<sup>15</sup> The inclusion of playing cards in this particular repre-  
 ntation of Ogoun Ferraille relates to the fact that he intended it in  
 is instance as a 'magical card', and Breton notes the similarity of  
 goun Ferraille to the juggler in the Tarot pack.  
 Many Haitian artists following Hyppolite have pursued the



10.28 Hector Hyppolite, *Agoué and his Consort*, 1945-8, oil on board, 62×77 cm., Collection Maurice C. and Patricia L. Thompson.



10.29 Philomé Obin, *Toussaint l'Ouverture Receives the Letter from the First Consul*, 1945, oil on masonite, 56.2×43.4 cm., Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas.

10.30 Rigaud Benoit, *The Interrupted Marriage*, 1966, oil on masonite, 65×57 cm., Collection Selden Rodman.





10.31 Voodoo Altar, Museo Nacional de Guanabacoa, Cuba.

10.32 Georges Liataud, *Siren*, 1952, forged and cut iron, 80×72×21.5 cm., Museo de Bellas Artes, Caracas.

10.33 Wilson Bigaud, *Sacrifice of the Cock*, 1954, oil on masonite, 46×62 cm., Collection Selden Rodman.



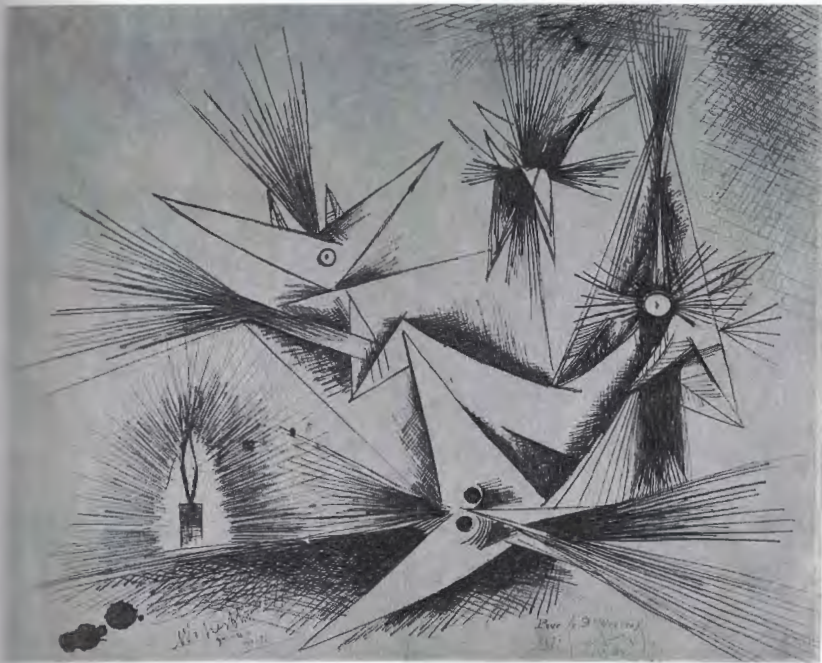
imagery and the practice of voodoo, although others like Rigoberto Benoit and Philomé Obin have also developed social and historical themes – as in Obin's canvas depicting the Caribbean's first independence leader, *Toussaint l'Ouverture* [Pls 10.29,30]. Although the commercial success of the Art Centre's operation meant that many of the artists had access to materials (Hyppolite, in desperate material circumstances, had used a kind of enamel paint on cardboard beer crates, torn up and patched together), others still worked with cast-off materials. Murat Briere, for instance, flattened oil petrol drums and cut out his shapes using the simplest tools, and Georges Liataud combined iron and ready-made objects to construct his totems and mythological creatures [Pl. 10.32].

The cults in Haiti, Cuba and Brazil have the same divinities, though they have different names, and these are mainly of African origin. While some versions of the cult in Cuba stress in their iconography their African roots, others, in the elaborate altar constructions in homes, assemble masses of different objects – cloth, Catholic images, cheap glass, souvenirs and toys, often with surprising iconographical associations with the particular divinity. Each deity has his or her own colour, metal, and animal and vegetable associations, and the objects in the decorative arrangements are laid out according to a principle of lateral symmetry – an organizational principle that is often evident in the work of otherwise very different artists in Cuba, like Manuel Mendive and Ruperto Matos [10.31, 35].

At the time of Breton's visit to Haiti, an exhibition of the Cuban artist Wifredo Lam opened in Port-au-Prince. When Hyppolite was asked his opinion of it, he suggested deferentially that it was 'Chinese magic' as opposed to 'African magic'. Although Lam had, on his return to Cuba in 1941, after a long stay in Paris, become immersed in the world of *santería*, he remained first and foremost a painter and not an initiate, and this was the difference, probably







10.34 Wifredo Lam, *Figure on Green Ground*, 1943, oil on paper, 106.5×83.5 cm., Museo Nacional, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Havana.

10.35 Manuel Mendive, *Obba*, 1967, plaka on canvas on wood, 66×78 cm., Museo Nacional, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Havana.

10.36 Wifredo Lam, *Moths and Candles*, 1946, pencil, pen and ink on paper, 51×62.1 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; David Rockefeller Latin American Fund.



PRIVATE WORLDS AND PUBLIC MYTHS

that Hyppolite was indicating. Although Lam did occasionally paint specific deities like Ogoun Ferraille, horned and with an iron horseshoe as head, or the 1944 *Altar for Eleggua* ('Loa Carrefour' in Haiti), his figures are more often more generalized: horned or masked, set within a tropical world, with titles like *The Dream*, *The Idol* [Pl. 10.37] or *Secret Ritual*.

Lam had quickly become involved with Surrealist circles in Paris, and Picasso had a special interest in him, perhaps feeling that Lam was closer to those secret worlds of primitive religion than he himself could be. 'The modern eye', wrote Breton, '... aware at last of the incomparable resources of the primitive vision, has fallen so in love with it that it would wish to achieve the impossible and wed it.'<sup>16</sup> Lam, like Picasso, took the primitive vision as inspiration, but at the same time, to the extent that he was a sophisticated artist, remained outside it.

Both Lam and Roberto Matta Echaurren had early left their native countries for Paris, and became associated with Surrealism there just before the Second World War. Whereas Lam subsequently returned and sought to root his identity as a painter in the Afro-African culture, Matta has consistently refused to be identified in any sense as a 'Latin American' painter. Indeed it was with a horror of the unresolvable problem of identity that he left Chile as a very young man. A series of brilliant oil paintings done during the years of his first association with the Surrealists explore visual metaphors for the mental landscape, hinting at different surfaces and levels of reality, and at the same time resorting in new ways to the surrealist practice of automatism [Pls 10.39, 40]. Matta is also one of the few surrealist artists to confront political themes directly, though always on his own terms and with no concession to 'prelatory ideologies' or to social realism, in the lithographs *Per Il Chile* (For Chile), for instance, or the wonderful satirical paintings of Eisenhower and the Cold War.



10.38 Wifredo Lam, *Untitled*, 1946, pen and ink, ink wash and traces of pencil on paper, 31.4×24.1 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Joan and Lester Avnet Collection.

10.37 (facing page) Wifredo Lam, *The Idol*, 1944, oil on canvas, 158×127 cm., Colección Villanueva, Caracas.

10.39 Roberto Matta Echaurren, *Joan of Arc*, 1942, crayon and pencil on paper, 59.1×73.9 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The James Thrall Soby Bequest.

10.40 Roberto Matta Echaurren, *Condors and Carrion*, 1941, crayon and pencil on paper, 58.4×73.7 cm., The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Inter-American Fund.





10.41 Roberto Matta Echaurren, *Invasion of the Night*, 1941, oil on canvas, 96.5×152.7 cm., San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Bequest of Jacqueline Onslow Ford.

10.42 Leonora Carrington, *The House Opposite*, c. 1947, oil on pastel, 33×83 cm., Tragopan Corporation Limited (The Edward James Collection), by permission of the Trustees of the Edward James Foundation.





PRIVATE WORLDS AND PUBLIC MYTHS

In Latin America, surrealist activities were pursued both by local groups and by refugees from Europe, such as Paalen, Alice Rahon, Pérez, Remedios Varo and Leonora Carrington, many of whom at different times settled in Mexico [Pls 10.42,44,45]. In 1942 Paalen founded the review *Dyn*, which was both a focus for and critical of Surrealism. It contained an exhilarating mixture of art, poetry, philosophy and ethnography, in the best tradition of the Surrealist reviews, and produced a special Amer-Indian number (December 1943) with contributions from leading Mexican specialists like Alfonso Caso and Miguel Covarrubias. In the same period the important review *Cuadernos Americanos* was founded, which had special sections devoted to Americanist research and to modern art. In 1944 *Cuadernos Americanos* published Juan Larrea's study 'El Surrealismo entre viejo y nuevo mundo' (Surrealism between the Old World and the New). Relating his argument to the much-debated issue of identity Larrea maintained that in the New World Surrealism's dream would be realized in the form of a 'universal poetic Realism'.

Surrealist periodicals and books had been fairly widely disseminated since the late Twenties, and the ideas of the group were taken up in various ways by both writers and artists – though in the case of the latter, on the level of individual interests rather than commitment to the movement as a whole. It has been in literature and poetry that Surrealism's influence has been most far-reaching. In Chile the review *Mandrágora* was founded in 1938 by three poets, Braulio Arenas, Enrique Gómez-Correa and Jorge Cáceres.<sup>17</sup>

*Mandrágora* ran for seven issues, though its public life continued until c. 1952, and included a Surrealist exhibition in 1948, and a long-running feud with the poet Pablo Neruda.<sup>18</sup> Vicente Huidobro, who had many contacts among the avant-garde and the Surrealists in France and Spain,<sup>19</sup> contributed to *Mandrágora*, although the editors distinguished clearly between themselves and Huidobro.



10.46 Graciela Aranis-Brignoni, *Like the Sand in my Veins, Like the Black in my Mouth*, 1934, photomontage, 23.7×16.8 cm., Schweizerische Stiftung für die Photographie.

10.45 (facing page) Remedios Varo, *Useless Science or The Alchemist*, 1958, oil on masonite, 142×52 cm., Private Collection.

10.47 Huillca (Antonio Huillca Hualpa), *Corpus Christi*, 1982, oil, 104×142 cm., Collection Luis Rivera Davalos.

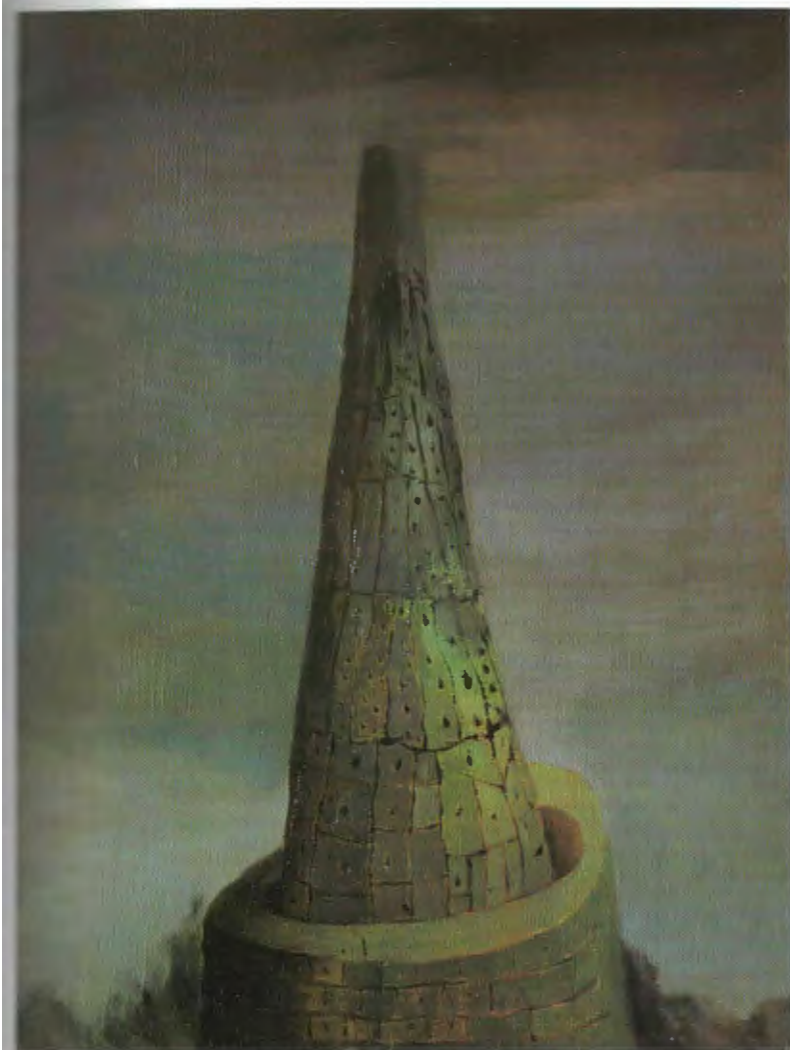


10.48 Batlle Planas, *The Message*, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires.



bro, who in their view remained a rationalist/modernist. They brought out a single issue of a *Boletín Surrealista*, and also maintained contact with the surrealist César Moro in Peru, and with Aldo Pellegrini in Argentina; the latter published the Surrealist-oriented review *Qué* in 1926, and was especially active as an anthologizer and disseminator of surrealist writings.

The Argentinian painter Roberto Aizenberg's relationship with Surrealism is particularly interesting, and follows a very individual path. He was partly influenced by the ideas of his teacher Batlle Planas, who was familiar with surrealist concepts of automatism [Pl. 10.48].<sup>20</sup> For Aizenberg, automatism became a way of 'evading the interference of local considerations';<sup>21</sup> – a kind of 'ideal abstraction' of the self, as Breton once described it, but not necessarily involving any Freudian dimension of exploring the unconscious. Both Picasso and de Chirico were important for Aizenberg, while some of his images of tiny figures in a deep landscape recall Dalí. The recurring theme of the tower, while clearly linked to de Chirico, and to sexual symbolism, is also symbolic of culture and tradi-



tion – a tower of Babel, for instance, or the tower with a brick base and its head in the clouds [Pls 10.49, 51, 52]. Aizenberg's work tends towards order rather than disorder, and holds a delicate balance between an almost geometrical abstraction and symbolism. The freedom from the conventional divisions and categories which operate in European modernism, characteristic of Aizenberg's work, has produced some of the continent's richest art.

10.49 Roberto Aizenberg, *Figures or Persons in a Landscape*, 1953, oil on canvas mounted on board, 31×24 cm., Collection Felisa and Mario H. Gradowczyk, Buenos Aires.

10.51 Roberto Aizenberg, *Tower*, October 1950, oil on canvas, 40×30 cm., Collection Roberto Aizenberg.

10.52 Roberto Aizenberg, *Tower*, 1978, oil on canvas, 93×57 cm., Collection Matilde Herrera.

10.50 Angel Acosta León, *The Colander*, 1961, oil on masonite, 123×94.5 cm., Museo Nacional, Palacio de Bellas Artes, Havana.