



## Down Below

*Leonora Carrington , Debra Taub (Illustrator)*

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Nonfiction. Fiction. Translated from the French by Victor Llona. DOWN BELOW is an account of Leonora Carrington's travels to Spain after having been declared "incurably insane." Carrington wrote and painted as a defender of the Surrealist movement into the twentieth century. DOWN BELOW was first published in 1944. This recent publication includes new collages by Debra Taub.

## Down Below Details

Date : Published January 1st 1983 by Black Swan Books, Limited (first published 1945)

ISBN : 9780941194174

Author : Leonora Carrington , Debra Taub (Illustrator)

Format : Paperback 56 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Art, Biography

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## From Reader Review Down Below for online ebook

### **Miranda (M.E.) Brumbaugh says**

Easily summed up as the summary notes, "its raw evocation of madness." True story, first person account of getting locked away in an insane asylum in World War II by someone who was pals with art collector Peggy Guggenheim and lovers with Surrealism master Max Ernst. She has a nervous breakdown when Max is arrested by the Gestapo leaving her alone, and her parents lock her away in the sanitarium. All of that sounds normal compared to what she goes through mentally when in the insane asylum. In fact, you could easily say she was indeed insane based on what you read about the Down Below and the other worlds within the walls, it's really very out there.

The fact she writes this all in first person in the 1980s when she is in her 70s, and it's not a fictional tale, makes it all the more alarming as she recalls everything that "happened" in such vivid color. Or is it in fact that she was given hallucinogenic drugs and so traumatized by sexual assault and unsanitary conditions that this is just what she experienced there? Either way she comes out of the institution and lives to be 94 as a leading artist of the Surrealist movement, author, and leader of the Women's Liberation Movement in Mexico.

To me the account of "Down Below" is her artistic nature in true form. I'm reading some of her short stories and this is her voice, the surrealist manipulating the view of the world. Instead of taking this book into consideration as a by-the-letter biographical account of her time in the asylum, it has to be taken into account from her artistic voice because the two coincide here. It's a work of art by an artist who has mastered the surrealist form in print.

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### **Sean A. says**

Surrealist painter and writer Leonora Carrington is going sort of insane. Also happening is the beginning of World War 2. Her partner, one Max Ernst, is sent to a concentration camp, and she begins to perform strange rituals (both visible to others and only visible to her interiority) and make strange connections.

Worse than this though for Leonora, is the anguish of being institutionalized shortly thereafter. She doesn't know where she is, she is not told, after being abducted by her captors, but she assumes she is in a concentration camp. She dreams of "Down Below", a land of both deliverance and torment which is literally below the floor where she is being held. This short book ends ambiguously and one must know about the author's backstory and career living as a successful and magically innovative Surrealist expatriate in Mexico to know that she made it out more or less OK

Props to Ms. Carrington for vocalizing the nearly unspeakable in her unique and connected way. She is a brave artist, and in this, the first of her texts I've read, also a brave writer. Her madness is very metaphysically and magically informed, so it should be noted that not all madness proceeds as such. Still it is a robust and thoughtful foray into the terrible terrain of insanity.

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## Bud Smith says

"I wondered who would help someone, dressed in a bed sheet and a pencil, to get to Madrid."

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## Srtapizca says

Leonora Carrington. Memorias de abajo. (Down Below).

◦

Llego a la vida de Leonora sin tener mucha idea de quien era, tan solo me dejé llevar por "el amor a primera vista" que solemos tener muchos cuando vemos un libro.

En estas Memorias de Abajo Leonora cuenta una época de su vida bastante dura. Su encierro en un psiquiátrico en España. Esta etapa marcará el resto de su vida y también será reflejada en su obra.

◦

El prólogo es de Elena Poniatowska y os dejo algunos apuntes sueltos que hace sobre Leonora .

- Leonora había sido una niña habitada por las leyendas celtas de su abuela irlandesa

- A Leonora le gustaba sembrar, fertilizar, ver crecer y cosechar, siempre le atrajo la sabiduría de la tierra.

- Una vez le pregunté si se había hecho pintora por decisión propia y me respondió: «creo que no he tomado una decisión en mi vida».

◦

Sólo puedo decir que caigo rendida a los pies de Leonora y que espero leer pronto el libro de Poniatowska.

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## raquel says

### 3.5

«(...) organicé mi propia defensa. Sabía que cerrando los ojos podía evitar la llegada del más insopportable de los sufrimientos: la mirada de los demás.»

## Reseña en español | Review in English (below)

Aunque me ha encantado leer a la propia Leonora Carrington y no solamente sobre Leonora, esperaba que estas *memorias* sobre su paso por el Sanatorio del doctor Morales en Santander me acercaran más a aquella realidad, pero prácticamente todo este encierro está narrado, tal cual y con más detalles, en Leonora de **Elena Poniatowska**, por lo que este libro lo he sentido más como una relectura. Eso sí: me apetece seguir leyendo a Carrington, porque creo que sus relatos surrealistas pueden llegar a gustarme mucho.

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Although I loved reading something 'written' by Leonora Carrington and not only about her, I was hoping that these *memories of Down Below* about her confinement in the Sanatorium of Dr. Morales in Santander would bring me closer to her experiences, but practically all this imprisonment is narrated, and even with more details, in Leonora by **Elena Poniatowska**, so I've felt this book like a rereading. Nevertheless, I want to continue reading her stories, because I think I may come to like them a lot.

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### **Chelsea says**

i need to write about my body

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### **Dina says**

Una de dos, o este libro es muy malo, o yo no he entendido nada de nada...

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### **Silvia Sba says**

Le pongo sólo tres estrellas porque no me ha sorprendido demasiado. En el libro "Leonora", de Elena Poniatowska, está prácticamente contado todo lo que le pasó cuando tuvo una crisis.

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### **Emma says**

This is intense and weird in terms of its events but tbh the pacing is the strangest thing about it, it rolls through it all so fast. It just adds to the surrealism though, everything is fluid (fiction + fact, time, place etc etc) and maybe a bit uncanny, and this is what really hooked me in, I think.

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### **Lucy Somerhalder says**

Leonora is SO great. I love her. And this is an incredible account of madness. A lucid(ish) account of madness from the pen of the 'mad'. But jeez. Max Ernst. What a dick.

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### **Mieke Schepens says**

"Waar stopt realiteit en waar begint waanzin?"

Een bijzondere kennismaking met een klein gedeelte van het werk van Leonora Carrington. Door het schrijven van de inleiding door Marina Warner wordt de lezer een kijkje gegund in het leven van Leonora Carrington. Het nodigt bovendien uit tot het bekijken van meer werk van haar hand.

'Beneden' kun je zien als een kunstwerk van deze auteur; ook dit grenst aan het surrealistische. Leonora leeft in de beschreven tijd met de gedachte dat wat zij bedenkt ook realiteit is, hierdoor worden synoniemen een nieuwe waarheid. Haar vertelkunst is uitgebreid, zodat je niets hoeft te missen van haar beleving; je begrijpt wat ze bedoeld heeft.

Leonora was geen volgzaam type; haar vader wilde voor haar een huwelijk dat zijn eigen status nog verder zou verhogen maar Leonora weigerde.

Na een debutantenbal schopte ze haar ouders door verliefd te worden op de zesentwintig jaar oudere Max Ernst die getrouwde was.

Lees mijn recensie hier verder: <https://graaggelezen.blogspot.com/201...>

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### **Ben Loory says**

I've been really enjoying Carrington's short stories, working my way through them very slowly, but this was a bit of a let-down. I'm all for memoirs of madness—and this is definitely one!—but it just feels too slight; there's no real meat to it, it's there and then it's gone and there's no real conflict or even movement. At the end it seems to be saying it was dictated to someone, and not actually written by Carrington, which makes sense—it feels like she sat down one afternoon and just told this long crazy story about the time she went crazy, and then it was time for tea and they went their separate ways and none of the depths or crevices of the story were ever investigated. Illuminating in a biographical way but doesn't hold a candle to the stories (or the paintings!!). Does have a cool cover, though.

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### **Callum McAllister says**

Man that was a bad time.

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### **Nate D says**

Poking about in my favorite bookstore in the city, the small but concentratedly splendid Book Thug Nation, I suddenly struck precisely the sort of unexpected find that keeps me pouring over dense-packed shelves with no idea what I'm looking for in the first place. Leonora Carrington may be my favorite writer of the first, interwar, wave of surrealists, with a deft touch for humor and sensible absurdity. I'm resolved to hunt down whatever I can from her, but she's only got a single book in print (her longer novel, the excellent *The Hearing Trumpet*), only one collection in the entire circulating New York public library system (*House of Fear: Notes From Down Below*), and is a tricky quarry on the second hand market.

So this 1983 reprint of her 1943 memoir of insanity, fitted with neat, Ernstian collage-illustrations from Debra Taub, is a fantastic find. I'd read this in the library collection before, but that was a revision to this original text and spotting some of the variations in Carrington's own account is pretty interesting. And it's just good to have such an incredibly strange but lucid account of the experience of being, yes, very very delusional, on hand. There's a bit where she's trying to work out a new relationship between her body, mind, and a mountainside, which is particularly illuminating, as well as later notes of the delirious cosmological implications of ordinary objects. Even completely untethered from ordinary reality, Carrington seems to have been a surrealist through and through.

(Note: reissued in 2017 by the NYRB!)

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## **Kimley says**

Vividly, dreamily terrifying.

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