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I N T E R N A T I O N A L



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ist painting tradition had ignited controversy upon her homecoming, when critic Fermín Fèvre, Videla's former cultural adviser, dismissed her work as derivative of that of Antonio Berni, late elder statesman of the socially committed style of *Nuevo Realismo*. Schwartz called Fèvre a *boludo* (jerk) in the cultural magazine *El Porteño*, and he in turn filed criminal charges against her and the offending publication, which replied by printing the names of culture workers who disappeared during his tenure. The festering wounds of the dictatorship, and the ongoing project of remembrance, would define Schwartz's art for decades.

In *Fondo L*, 2008, the ghostly outline of a woman's face emerges from a surface encrusted with sand and shells collected from the Río de la Plata, where the remains of the victims of Videla's purge were discarded. This Plutonic visage conjures the memory of Hilda Fernández and another lost friend, artist Liliana Maresca, who died of AIDS in 1994. For Schwartz, the work of mourning is sharpened by rage, identified as the source of creation in the title of the stunning *Erinia* (*el misterio del arte*) (Erinyes [The Mystery of Art]), 2003. Here, the atavistic goddess of vengeance—wings slicked with black tar, purple breasts exposed—mauls her prey. Unsated by her kill, she throws her head back, piranha teeth gnashing—an avenger undeluded by dreams of justice or resolution. Quoth the artist, "I wake up full of anger, which for the Greeks was a very positive energy, close to inspiration."

—Chloe Wyma

Agatha Wojciechowsky

ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY

Death is met by sweetness and light in the ebullient, ethereal work of Agatha Wojciechowsky (1896–1986), a renowned spirit medium, teacher, artist, and healer whose drawings, paintings, and sundry personal effects were on display here in a modest but moving presentation titled "Spirits Among Us."

Wojciechowsky (née Wehner) was born in Steinach, Germany, came to the United States in 1923, started a family while living in New Jersey, and eventually settled in New York City with her husband, Leo, and two children, Ingeborg and William Roland. She was keenly aware of her preternatural gifts for a long time, claiming that she received her first communiqués from the hereafter when she was only four. But instead of running away from these encounters she embraced them and resolved to hone her talents—she joined the Universal Spiritualist Association, studied with medium Bertha Marks (who introduced her to a girl named Mona, Marks's phantom guide), and became a spiritualist minister in 1961. However, she had no desire to create art until 1951, when she was well into middle age. It was during this period that Wojciechowsky began experiencing fits of restlessness in her hands. These bouts were often quite intense and sometimes, in order to still—and *steel*—herself, she'd "clutch her purse so hard . . . that her fingernails bled," according to Charles O'Neal, a devoted pupil and the director of a short Super 8 film about Wojciechowsky from 1976. With Marks's help, Wojciechowsky learned that the spirits were attempting to rouse her into action, as they wanted to use her hands to write, draw, and paint. Ultimately, she heeded their commands: Wojciechowsky generated scores of texts in an arcane language whose fanciful letterforms resemble a jittery amalgam of Cyrillic, Arabic, and Hebrew, and produced hundreds of images, frequently teeming with alien forms and faces—i.e., portraits of ambient souls. Like many mediums who take up automatic picture making, Wojciechowsky was reluctant to identify as an artist because she saw herself, first and foremost, as "an instrument of the spirit world." Yet her work found its way into the collections of several major institutions, including the Art Institute of

Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and she's been shown alongside a bevy of modernist luminaries, such as Marcel Duchamp and Isamu Noguchi. Yet one wonders if she secretly may have been embarrassed by her lack of formal artistic training. Apparently, Italian Renaissance painter Paolo Veronese once contacted her. Unfamiliar with his work, she visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan to investigate. She was supposedly so overcome by the exquisite skill and beauty of his art that, in a paroxysm of rage, she destroyed a slew of her own watercolors.

Of course, Wojciechowsky had nothing to be ashamed of: Her output is playful, affectionate, and tender. Heaven was everywhere in this enigmatic exhibition, perhaps most splendidly in the polychromatic tableau *Untitled*, 1970, a pastel-on-paper rendering of a ladderlike being with multiple heads who is rising from a verdant field into the firmament, which seems to be occupied by red, gold, and green . . . flowers? Angels? Celestial schooners? Maybe all of the above. A colored-pencil drawing from 1971 features an outline of someone's right hand that's packed with tiny, serene faces—representations of the sitter's myriad past lives. And in a wall-mounted vitrine installed below Wojciechowsky's silvery spirit trumpet (a device used by mediums during séances to better hear the whispers of the dead) sat a typed-up holiday sermon authored by the artist, part of which reads OPEN YOUR HEART TO US, THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON, LET US PUT A DROP OF OIL IN YOUR LAMP OF LIFE TO MAKE IT WARM SO AS WE YOUR TEACHERS AND FRIENDS FROM THE WORLD OF SPIRIT CAN STEP CLOSE TO YOU. . . TAKE OUR OUTSTRETCHED HAND AND OUR BLESSING AS OUR CHRISTMAS PRESENT TO YOU. . . IN SPIRITUAL LOVE TAKE OUR GREETINGS.

Amen, dear reverend, and countless thanks.

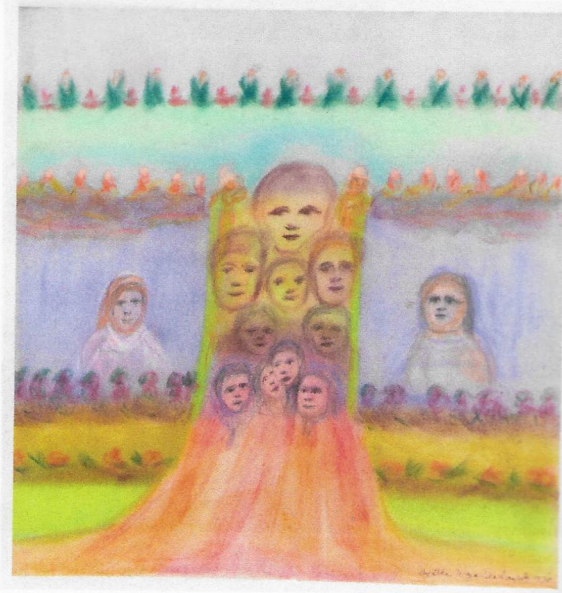
—Alex Jovanovich

Jennifer Carvalho

HELENA ANRATHER

Jennifer Carvalho's "Sign of the Times," her exhibition of fifteen oil paintings at Helena Anrather, pulled the hefty weight of art history into the iffy present. The Canadian artist extracts details from well-known works of art—via cinema, antiquity, and the Renaissance—and reconstitutes them as a trove of murky reliquiae and amputations. She uses a uniformly dark palette, linking disparate eras and iconographies by filtering them through a very particular lens; her subjects are tightly cropped, close up, and dreamily out of focus. In Carvalho's remakes, aqueous tones and daubed, bloody lines look sodden, the recurrence of green, violet, and gray suggesting the moodiness of twilight underwater.

Hellmouth, 2020, brings the viewer face-to-face with the open maw of a gigantic sixteenth-century stone sculpture of the ancient demon Orcus that rests in Italy's Garden of Bomarzo. Carvalho's rendering centers the black depths of the mouth in the frame, pulling our gaze into



Agatha Wojciechowsky
Untitled, 1970, pastel
on paper, 13½ × 13"