

Large Print Exhibition Guide

Eileen Agar:

Angel of Anarchy

19 May– 29 August 2021



Galleries 1, 8 & 9

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Eileen Agar: Angel of Anarchy

Eileen Agar (1899–1991) was one of the most adventurous and prolific artists of her generation. Throughout her seventy-year career she synthesised elements of two of twentieth-century western culture's most significant artistic tendencies – Cubism and Surrealism – in a diverse and kaleidoscopic practice which moved freely through drawing, painting, photography, collage and sculpture. Fascinated by classical art, ancient mythologies, sexual pleasure and the natural world, Agar mined these subjects for the forms and content that filled her works. For her, Surrealism provided 'the interpenetrating of reason and unreason' and she used it to inject wit, irreverence and emotion into the more analytical realms of Cubism. In doing so, Agar created a distinct and spirited style, entirely her own. Agar was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina into a wealthy and flamboyant family. Her mother was strict and Agar was a rebellious child with a burgeoning interest in art.

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So, at the age of six she was sent – alone – to attend a series of rigorous academic schools in England.

Unbeknown to her parents, at one of these schools, Heathfield, Agar was tutored by the painter Lucy Kemp-Welch RA, who instructed her to 'always have something to do with art'. These artistic foundations, combined with the trauma of the First World War led Agar to pursue a life which she saw as more fulfilling than that of becoming a debutante. As a rift grew between her and her parents, she pursued her artistic aspirations and took up a place at The Slade School of Fine Art, London in 1921.

A full-colour exhibition catalogue including images of all the works in the exhibition plus newly commissioned essays, and writings by Agar is available from the Whitechapel Gallery bookshop.

Gallery 1

The surprise of Surrealism and the draw of Cubism

Following her studies, Agar became frustrated by the traditional, figurative style she had been taught at The Slade. She was interested in abstraction and the artistic revolution she saw happening in Europe. In 1929 Agar travelled to Paris, where she met Surrealists André Breton and Paul Éluard, as well as beginning painting lessons with Czech Cubist František Foltýn. She was simultaneously drawn to the sensuality and irrationality of Surrealism, as well as the idealism and logic of Cubism. Her early explorations into both movements – taken in tandem – allowed Agar to cultivate a unique style that would endure for the rest of her life. In 1936 Agar was visited by the curators planning the International Surrealist Exhibition in London that year. From Agar's studio they selected three oil paintings and

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five objects, much to her astonishment: 'the sudden attention took me by surprise.

One day I was an artist exploring highly personal combinations of form and content, the next I was calmly informed I was a Surrealist!' Agar was excited by the Surrealists' desire to paint the subconscious but sought to supplement her Surreal compositions with a Cubist appreciation of form and texture. Moreover, Agar did not approve of the way Surrealist women were treated by their male peers. As one of a small but notable group of women attached to the movement she used the emphasis Surrealism placed on imaginative freedom to envision a world where gender boundaries were fluid and the structures of patriarchy less rigorously enforced.

You can find out more about the pivotal role of women within the Surrealist movement in Britain in our current archive gallery exhibition *Phantoms of Surrealism*.

Collaging the natural world

For Agar, collage and its sculptural sister, assemblage, were two of the Surrealist techniques that held the most appeal – as she attached great importance to instinctual response and the unexpected collision of previously unconnected images. At the same time, the ocean and the natural world were becoming important influences for Agar who favoured organic objects over the European Surrealists' preferred found object – something humanmade which might be discovered in a flea-market or junk shop. Agar began to use natural forms as creative problem-solvers, collecting stones, bones, horns, shells, textiles, ceramics, fossils, leaves and other oddments which she would use to provoke or spark her creativity: 'I surround myself with fantastic bric-à-brac in order to trigger my imagination. For it is a certain kind of sensitive chaos that is creative, and not sterile order.' Forest-and beachcombing thus quickly became favourite working methods for Agar and in 1934 she began to formally experiment with collage.

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In her paintings of the time she was playing with watery translucencies and layering effects, but now collage offered 'a displacement of the banal by the fertile intervention of coincidence' and she used it to pull together many of her influences. She collected and combined imagery and specimens of the body, insects, birds, snakes, butterflies, flowers, leaves, classical mythologies, contemporary politics and silhouetted heads and hands, playing with their scale and orientation with poetic, emotive or jarring results.

Gallery 9

Nature as a sculptor:

Agar's assemblage and photography

Agar was fascinated by the natural world, she writes 'you see the shape of a tree, the way a pebble falls or is formed, and you are astounded to discover that dumb nature makes an effort to speak to you.' She sought out sculptural forms in nature, which she then choreographed into fantastical collages and sculptures. Her assemblages have a tentative quality as well as a visual playfulness. When asked about their seeming fragility she commented that they had been found 'at the behest of chance and went that way also'. Many of her objects are now known only from photographs, and records show that she repurposed several of them. In 1936 Agar travelled to Ploumanach, France where she was struck by the coastal rock formations. Emphasising her belief that the Surreal is formed by nature, Agar described the rocks as 'sculpted by the

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sea, that master worker of all time, as if nature had arranged a show of sculpture in the open air.' Keen to document the extraordinary rocks, Agar travelled to the nearest town to buy a camera. She purchased a Rolleiflex square-format camera that would become 'a constant companion'. From this point on photography began to assume a greater role in her practice. Her photographs show her curious eye and reflect the subjects which endured throughout her career; landscapes, seascapes, shipwrecks, natural and human-made found objects, alongside portraits of her partner Joseph Bard, and friends such as Nusch and Paul Éluard, Dora Maar, Lee Miller, Roland Penrose and Pablo Picasso.

Gallery 8

Wartime anxieties

In 1939, the onset of war interrupted Agar's artistic activity significantly. Though a pacifist, she enlisted in the war effort, volunteering in a canteen on Savile Row. Agar and Bard also served as Fire Watchers on night duty and in their London home they hosted friends fleeing persecution in Europe, or newly homeless due to the Blitz. Remaining in London allowed Agar to keep her studio, though she 'felt it impossible to concentrate on painting when you could turn to look out of the window and see a Messerschmitt flying low over the treetops.' She found collage – with its more political foundations and direct symbolism – a medium she could maintain. Her work of this period is dense and loaded, filled with desire, anxiety and a sense of urgency. When the war ended Agar 'felt like something new and marvellous ought to happen' but she was 'exhausted and humdrum, more dispirited than usual.' She describes

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this period as a physical and spiritual famine. Yearning for change but with travel outside of the country difficult, she visited Cornwall and the Lake District to replenish her imagination. Slowly Agar returned to painting as if 'renewing a belief in life itself'. Her works from the late 1940s reveal a cautious optimism, often employing a gentler pastel colour palette to depict layered, stencilled and painted forms. These works feel like a wary step towards celebration, and, following years of rationing, a hopeful nod to more plentiful days ahead.

Post-war experiments: automatism and frottage

Over the next ten years Agar was 'still aware of a sense of despondency and threatened by morbidity'. She travelled as much as possible, gradually working herself out of a sense of gloom. In 1953 she was invited to spend the winter in Tenerife, a trip which became 'a watershed in my life' sparking her creativity

and emboldening her to return year upon year. 'I had been too long cut off from the world of nature, too cooped up, too cribbed and confined, and the relief of finding one's roots responding to the quickening pulse of vegetation, the vast mountain-scapes, the sea horizons, all this made me fall in love with that mountainous dew-drop in the ocean and I revived and could work again.' By the mid-1950s, Agar was enjoying a successful period of painting, travelling and exhibiting and had begun to feel like herself again: 'surely room must be made for joy in this world?' Her work was beginning to blur the divisions between collage, drawing and painting and she continued to experiment with Surrealist techniques such as frottage, automatism and decalcomania. Some of Agar's most striking uses of automatism, or spontaneous painting, can be found in a small selection of poured paintings. Here she uses oil and enamel paints to create portraits in loose outlines, fluid drips and swirling backgrounds.

Late painting and the joy of acrylic

In 1958, Agar moved to a much larger studio. For the first time she could paint at a scale she hadn't been able to before. Soon after, in 1965, she was introduced to acrylic paint. She found acrylic to be 'very versatile, it can be used as impasto, with a palette knife or a thin wash. I had found an ideal medium, and I wanted to both master and stretch it.' The large paintings she made during the 1970s and 80s are tightly composed, layered works that emulate collage but are created entirely in paint. The now characteristic Agar motifs appear – shells, birds, fossils, hands, silhouetted forms and foliage – all skillfully incorporated into her meticulously arranged canvases. Agar published her autobiography in 1989 and was made a Royal Academician in 1990. During the final years of her life, she continued to work every day, finding continual joy in her art: 'life's meaning is lost without the spirit of play.'

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In play all that is lovely and soaring in the human spirit strives to find expression. In play the mind is prepared to enter a world where different laws apply, to be free.' Her primary interests endured throughout her career, all the while following the two parallel paths of abstraction and Surrealism: 'the two movements that interested me most. I see nothing incompatible in that, indeed we walk on two legs, and for me, one is abstract, the other Surreal – it is point and counterpoint.'

Large Print Wall Labels

This guide contains large print versions of all wall texts and labels included in Galleries 1, 8 and 9.

This guide is partially illustrated to aid navigation of the exhibition, if you are in need of any assistance please feel free to ask a Gallery Ambassador for assistance.

Gallery 1

This guide begins with the first wall label on the left of the entrance to Gallery 1 and continues in a clockwise direction around the space. The guide then moves onto the free-standing wall at the front of gallery 1 and free standing sculptures.

(Wall text)

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One day I was an artist exploring highly personal combinations of form and content, the next I was calmly informed I was a Surrealist!' Agar was excited by the Surrealists' desire to paint the subconscious but sought to supplement her Surreal compositions with a Cubist appreciation of form and texture. Moreover, Agar did not approve of the way Surrealist women were treated by their male peers. As one of a small but notable group of women attached to the movement she used the emphasis Surrealism placed on imaginative freedom to envision a world where gender boundaries were fluid and the structures of patriarchy less rigorously enforced.

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Three Symbols

1930

Oil on canvas

Tate: Purchased 1964

Three Symbols, originally named *Flying Pillar*, was begun in Paris in 1928 and finished in London in 1930. It is one of the first works Agar made in a new experimental style which synthesises Cubist and Surrealist influences and marks her 'first attempt at an imaginative approach to painting'. In this floating composition, Agar set out to represent three cultures – a Greek column represents the ancient world, a Gothic Cathedral (Notre Dame) denotes medieval Christianity and a bridge built by Gustave Eiffel stands as a symbol of modern technology 'reaching into the future and expressing the time to come.'

Family Trio, 1931
Pen and Ink on paper
James Birch

Family Trio, 1931
Woodcut on paper
The Court Gallery,
Somerset



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Family Trio, 1931

Watercolour on paper

James Birch

Agar's collection of works titled Family Trio – an engraving, pen and ink drawing, watercolour and oil painting – were informed by her theory of womb magic, 'in Europe, the importance of the unconscious in all forms of Literature and Art establishes the dominance of a feminine order over the classical and more masculine order. Creative interpretation, and artistic and imaginative life is under the sway of womb magic.' Three figures recur, one representing ancient patriarchy, another central, floating feminine form straddles land and sea, while an embryonic, emergent child forms in the sea, under a crescent moon. Here the natural, animal and human kingdoms coalesce towards a universal organicism, twilight in colour and budding with nascent hope.

The Unnatural Child, 1934

Oil on canvas

Private Collection



Continues on next page.

The Modern Muse, 1934

Oil on canvas

Private collection

The Modern Muse as well as similar works, Madonna with a Cat's Cradle and The Unnatural Child was painted during the time that Agar was developing her theory of 'womb magic', in which she outlines: 'in Europe, the importance of the subconscious in all forms of Literature and Art establishes the dominance of a feminine order over the classical and masculine order. Apart from rampant and hysterical militarism, there is no male element left in Europe, for the intellectual and rational conception of life has given way to a more miraculous creative interpretation, and artistic and imaginative life is under the sway of womb-magic.' The Modern Muse echoes these ideas, the orange and yellow heart-shaped face seemingly in a cycle of never-ending movement is un-gendered, a modern take on the stereotypical notion of the woman as a muse. Here Agar seems to make creativity itself her muse.

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Madonna with a Cat's Cradle, 1934

Oil on canvas

Private Collection



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Quadriga, 1935

Oil on canvas

The Penrose Collection

As the most celebrated of Agar's works to be included in the International Surrealist Exhibition in London, 1936, Quadriga demonstrates Agar's unique ability to combine Surrealist tendencies with classical references. The horse head is inspired by an image that Agar had of the chariot of Selene, the Moon goddess, on the Parthenon in Athens. This is also one of Agar's most political works, her repetition of the horse head calls to mind the mythology around The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and references the rising threat of fascism in Europe in 1935: 'war was encroaching on the selfish peace of England: the Spanish Civil War acted as a kind of distant prelude to the Second World War, and it was to be many years before the Four Horsemen allowed their steeds to return to my frame.

Winter, 1935

Oil on canvas

**Collection of David and Marcel Fleiss, Galerie
1900–2000, Paris**

Along with *Quadriga*, *Winter* was one of three paintings and five objects by Agar to be selected for the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1936. At the centre of the painting, above a background of rectangular blocks of deep mauve and green, is a densely packed composition of interlaced organic and geometric forms, fluid lines and curved shapes decorated with intricate patterns and spirals. The work exemplifies the formation of Agar's unique style, whereby Surreal, abstract forms appear as symbols open to interpretation.

Procession, 1934

Oil and collage on canvas

Private collection

One of Agar's first attempts at combining her nascent collage practice with her painting skills, *Procession* almost feels like a smaller companion work to *Autobiography of an Embryo* – though the later does not employ collage. Similar in format and palette though, this intimate work draws on the themes of cyclical time and seasonal rhythms that *Autobiography* explores, but now builds on them through the addition of collaged leaves, flowers and dominoes, which were a regular feature in Agar's work of the mid 1930s. *Procession* also includes some of the motifs that would recur throughout Agar's career, such as the face in profile, the multicoloured checkerboard, zigzag, the fishing net and the strange owl-like figure who will make many more appearances.

Guardian of Memories, 1938

Oil, crayon and collage on board

UK Government Art Collection

By the late 1930s Agar was beginning to incorporate collage into her paintings. Her experiments with layering, the juxtaposition of disparate forms and varying transparencies had greatly influenced her approach to painting. In this layered, textured work, elements of pattern and geometrical planes are combined with deconstructed figurative elements suggestive of a woman's face – in particular the eyes, nose and chin in profile – interwoven into a complex pattern. The work reveals Agar's complicated relationship with Surrealism, particularly its attempts to express the unconscious mind, which she was dubious about. Here she explores that uncertainty through layers of translucencies and opacities. In spite of its fluidity, this is a crisp, well-ordered composition. The geometric forms in the background give the image clarity while Agar's recurrent use of blue balances the work.

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Head in Profile, c.1950

Collage

The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA



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Animal Skull and Hand, c.1950

Pastel and collage on paper

Collection of Simon Moretti and Paul Heber-Percy

Skulls, x-rays and diagrams frequently occur across Agar's paintings and collages. Amongst her collection of coloured glass lantern slides bequeathed to the Tate Archive are numerous diagrams of the body and its internal organs, cell structures, ribcages, biological diagrams, animal and human vertebrae. At the centre of this Surreal collage, Agar has pasted a detailed drawing of an animal skull with a cut out anatomical drawing of a human hand underneath, which reaches outwards and rests its thumb on the creature's nose. The collaged elements are set atop a linear blue, yellow and black composition and surrounded by a densely worked turquoise and vivid pink background.

Precious Stones, 1936

Collage on paper

Leeds Museums and Galleries

The silhouette of a head in profile would quickly become a recurring motif for Agar, the earliest example found in *Autobiography of an Embryo*. Here in *Precious Stones*, a male face in profile becomes the central form. Pasted onto a white sheet of paper and framed by several additional sheets, which form a border around the image, the silhouette is cut from a book on gemstones. The grid-like arrangement of numbered stones contrasts with the fluid outline of the portrait which – literally – cuts into the gems' categorical arrangement. A touching tribute to Joseph Bard, who was an avid collector of precious stones, the work also suggests an homage to certain historical styles of embossed portraiture on coins or stamps. And at a deeper level reflects Agar's tussle between order and tradition, and her interest organic forms and the natural world.

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Beetles and Hand, 1966
Ink and collage on card
Redfern Gallery, London



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Marine Collage, 1939

Collage on paper

The Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection of Dada and Surrealist Art in the Israel Museum

Marine Collage is one of Agar's most acclaimed collages. Here she employs collage's principles of chance with great dexterity in order to bring together a combination of sea creatures and classical imagery. Divided into four sections – like *Autobiography of an Embryo* but this time arranged in a portrait format – Agar leads the viewer's eye through an accumulation of fish, snakes, leeches and lamprey arranged within the silhouettes of four heads or busts. The silhouetted forms appear as 'cut-outs' so that the various aquatic animals seem to swim through the minds of these four figures – recalling the frequently drawn parallel between the subconscious and the depths of the ocean.

Etoiles de Mer, n.d.

Collage of starfish and printed paper on painted cardboard

Ubu Gallery, New York



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Collage Head, 1937

Collage and mixed media on paper

The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA

This is one a number of works – along with Sea Nymph and Precious Stones – to feature the portrait-in-profile style employed by Agar. The central profile is a cut out of an illustrated crustacean identification chart featuring squid, octopuses, shrimp, crills and hermit crabs floating in the water with sea grass flowing upwards. The shoulders of the figure are indicated by the image behind, which resembles a photograph of a marble or stone sculpture, with wavy lines that could be a section of carved hair. The whole collage then rests against a delicate pink border. The organic, natural forms suggest a sense of freedom and disorder and allude to the unconscious and irrational processes of creativity, carefully contained within the ordered outline of the human form.

Untitled (Box), 1935

Mixed media assemblage with dried seahorse

The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA

Untitled (Box) is a prime example of Agar's use of the found object and interest in marine life. Inside this exquisite box is inlaid a dried seahorse which lies on its back amongst small fragments of coloured coral, shells and feathers, all wrapped in a fishing net. A bright blue, plastic Eye of Horus looks out from the centre of the vibrantly coloured backdrop. These objects are likely to have been found while beach trawling and show Agar's ability to transform and weave together natural and human-made found objects into an exquisite three-dimensional collage.

Sea Nymph, 1950

Oil on board

Redfern Gallery, London



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(Wall Text)

Collaging the natural world

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Forest-and-beachcombing thus quickly became favourite working methods for Agar and in 1934 she began to formally experiment with collage. In her paintings of the time she was playing with watery translucencies and layering effects, but now collage offered 'a displacement of the banal by the fertile intervention of coincidence' and she used it to pull together many of her influences. She collected and combined imagery and specimens of the body, insects, birds, snakes, butterflies, flowers, leaves, classical mythologies, contemporary politics and silhouetted heads and hands, playing with their scale and orientation with poetic, emotive or jarring results.

Two Figures, n.d.

**Oil and collage on canvas Pritchard-Denyer
Collection**



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Ladybird, 1936

Gelatin silver print with gouache and ink

The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA

Agar was certainly astute to the duplicitous gender expectations among the Surrealists: 'double-standards seem to have proliferated, and the women came off worse... The men were expected to be very free sexually, but when a woman adopted the same attitude the hypocritical upset was tremendous.' Aware of the fact that they were often reduced to the role of a muse, the women of Surrealism began to reappropriate their own appearances. Ladybird is a strong example, the work consists of a black and white photograph of Agar – taken by Bard – in which she holds a sheet of transparent material in front of her naked body, Agar has then drawn atop the image with sinuous lines, hands, discs, stars – and a ladybird – to create a sensual and empowering depiction of herself as an artist in her own right.

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Untitled, 1936

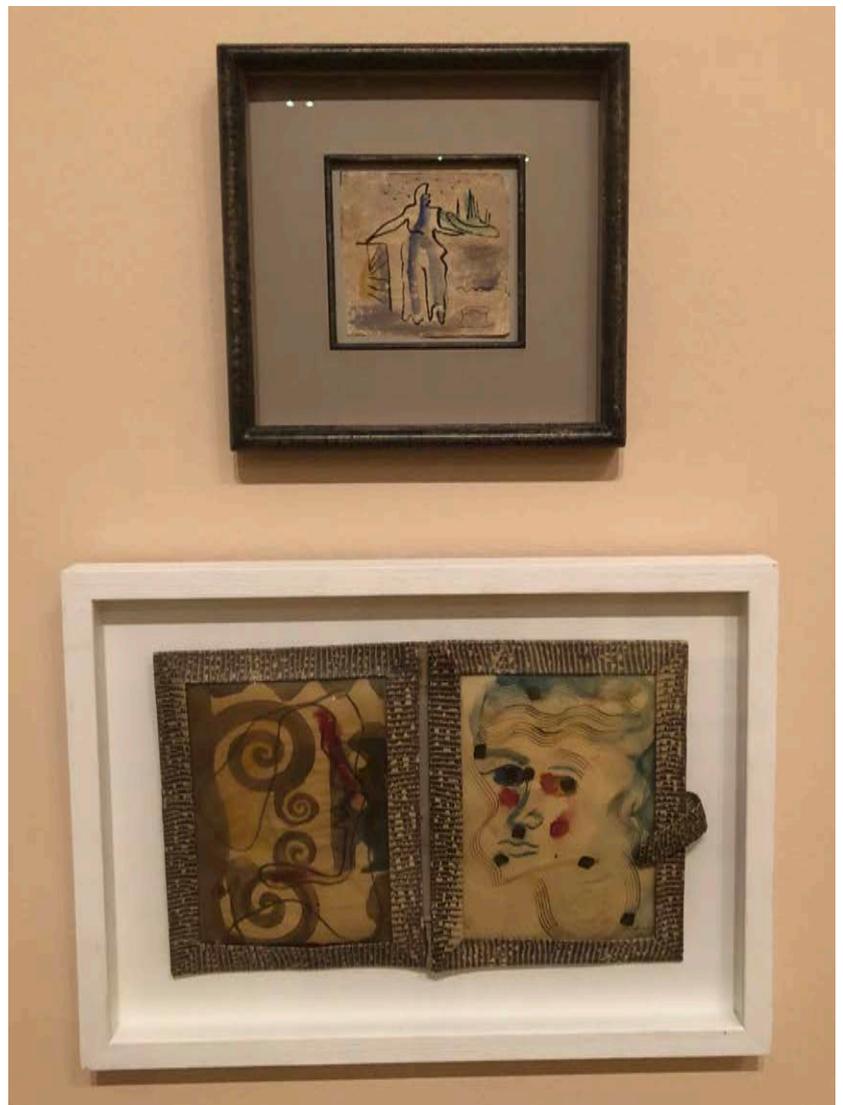
Watercolour and ink paper

Redfern Gallery, London

**Two Surrealist compositions in snakeskin photo
frame, 1948**

**Watercolour and
ink on paper**

James Birch



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Portrait of Ursula Goldfinger c.1938

Mixed media and collage on board Private collection

Agar created a number of mixed media portrait studies in which the linear profile of a face occupies the centre of the composition and is interwoven with layers of frottage, collage, pastel and paint. This is one of a number of studies of her friend Ursula Goldfinger whose husband, architect Erno Goldfinger participated as a Surrealist in the Artists' International Association exhibitions of 1937 and 1938 in London. Erno Goldfinger – who Agar also depicted a number of times – is renowned for designing the home and furniture that he shared with Ursula at Willow Road, Hampstead, close to the home of Roland Penrose. Their house and art collection are now owned by the National Trust and includes work by Agar, Max Ernst and Henry Moore.

Portrait Study, n.d.
Gouache on paper
Private Collection



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Infinite Loop, 1941

Mixed media on paper

Galerie Berinson, Berlin

From the beginning of her artistic career Agar was a keen and talented draftsman, often sketching family and friends as well as the natural world around her. This work is essentially a self-portrait, drawn with a simple black line that seems to curl or loop back onto itself – endlessly. It is then embellished with delicate floral forms, a sprinkling of red hearts, some heavier black swooshes and a selection of unusual propeller forms. Agar has replaced her torso with an urn-like structure, similar to the amphora shape that frequently makes an appearance in her works. Created during the early years of the war, Infinite Loop feels like a love letter from Agar to herself and to her own, infinite creativity.

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Archive Vitrine (at the back of Gallery 1)

1 Sketch of Joseph Bard, n.d., pencil, ink and watercolour on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

2 Sketch of a man's head, n.d., graphite on paper. Tate Archive

3 Sepia photograph of Agar in sheer costume with hanging basket, photographer and date unknown. Private collection

4 Sketch of a female figure surrounded by an anchor and boats, n.d., graphite and watercolour on paper. Tate Archive

5 Sketch of Joseph Bard, n.d., pencil, ink and watercolour on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

6 Cut out drawing of Joseph Bard, n.d., pencil and ink on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

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7 Collage consisting of the lower legs of a statue cut out of a magazine or photograph and glued onto a painting of the head and torso of a man, n.d., watercolour and printed paper on paper. Tate Archive

8 Frottage drawings, n.d., ink and oil-pastel on waxed paper. Private collection

9 Abstract sketch of a horse rearing, n.d., watercolour on paper. Tate Archive

10 Sketch of a statue of a horse's head, n.d., graphite on paper. Tate Archive

11 Album of black-and-white photographs of Agar paintings, n.d. Redfern Gallery, London

12 Abstract watercolour drawing of a head, n.d., watercolour on paper. Tate Archive

13 Abstract watercolour drawing of a head, n.d.,
watercolour on paper. Tate Archive

14 Early sketchbook, n.d. Private collection

Untitled (Head Study), n.d.

Pencil, pen, wax crayon and correction fluid on paper

Collection of Moretti and Paul Herber-Percy

Surrealist Composition:

Face, 1931 Pencil on paper

James Birch

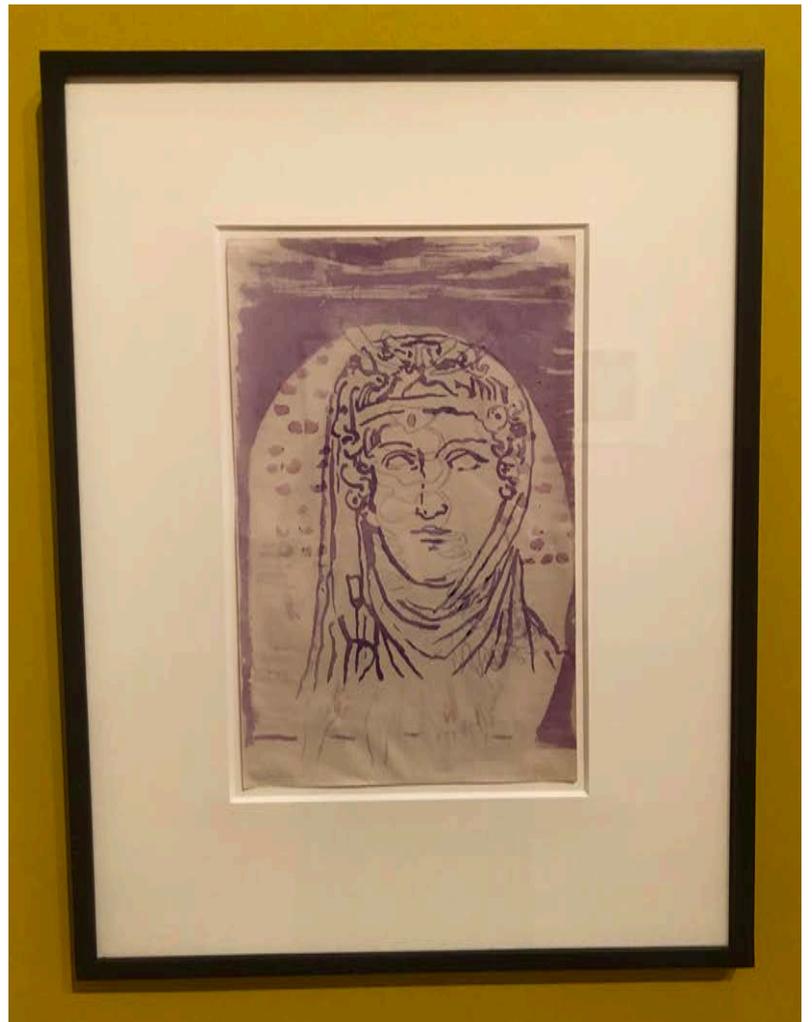


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Untitled (Classical Figure), c.1940

Watercolour on paper

Collection of Simon Moretti and Paul Herber-Percy



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The Guardians of the Shrine, 1987

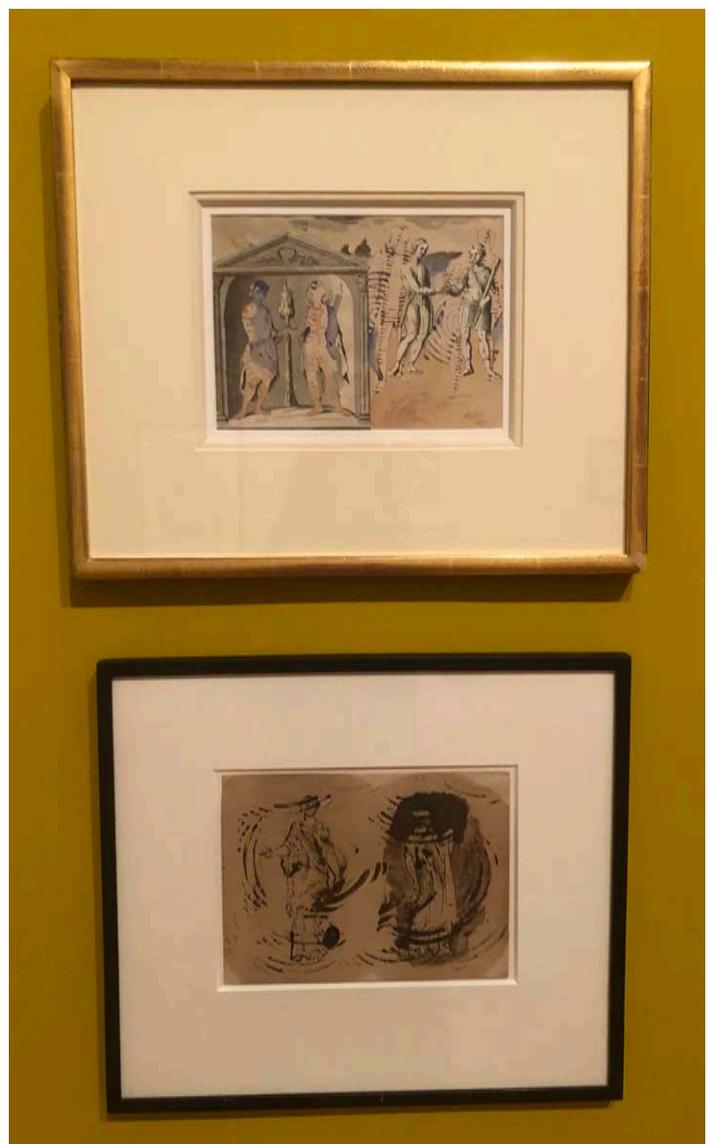
Watercolour and Collage on Paper

Austin / Desmond Fine Art

Untitled (Two Classical Figures), 1944

Frottage and ink on paper

Collection of Simon Moretti and Paul Herbet-Percy



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Self Portrait, n.d. Pen and Ink
Private collection



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Muse of Construction, 1939

Oil on canvas

Private collection

The first title Agar proposed for this painting was The Urn Goddess because of the amphora-shaped body of the central figure. However Agar changed her mind and chose the present title as a more explicit – and irreverent – reference to its protagonist. The painting is based on a photograph Agar had taken of Picasso on the beach at Mougins, France in 1937. The title exposes her complicated feelings toward the artist and the way that she was ‘careful not to be pulled too far into his influence.’ Rather she positions him as a muse for herself, flipping the gender stereotype of a female muse for a male artist. The painting is also a mischievous tribute to Picasso though, in its use of Cubist flattened planes, areas of isolated texture, and fluid, disparate outlines which create the architectural contours of his body.

Continues on next page.

Untitled Collage, 1936

Mixed media and collage on paper

The Mayor Gallery

This is one of the most fully resolved and ambitious examples of Agar's use of collaged leaves. The beginning of a watercolour underpainting and crayon drawing is faintly visible, with three figures outlined. One more prominent central figure, with green stars in his eyes, reaches up to the clouded sky above and might represent the Green Man, spirit of the harvest. The collaged additions include organic elements: leaves, dried flowers, sycamore seeds, stalks and leaves, alongside humanmade objects: a lace doily, a tiny violin, two painted plastic starfish and a small triangle of chequerboard, which together build up a harmonious and bountiful composite image.

Philemon and Baucis, 1939

Collage, chalk frottage and gouache

The Mayor Gallery

This apparently simple collage comprises two shapes carefully constructed from woodgrain frottage. They are cut out to represent Philemon and Baucis, the poverty-stricken elderly married couple of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* who offered hospitality to a pair of disguised gods, Jupiter and Mercury. As a reward for the couple's generosity, the gods turned them into two trees, an oak and a linden, which is the moment Agar depicts here. It is not a spontaneous creation, but a careful combination of collage and frottage; the long, jagged edges of each tree form, one with horizontal and the other vertical interior markings place them in dialogue with one another, while a coloured horizontal blue line beneath indicates the ground which links them together.

Studio Floor, 1940

Watercolour and frottage on paper

Redfern Gallery, London

Three Faces, c.1935

Mixed media on paper

Ubu Gallery, New York



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Hand, Bird and Music, 1938

Collage on paper

Private Collection



Continues on next page.

Surrealist Collage, 1938

Collage on paper

Offer Waterman and The Mayor Gallery



Continues on next page.

Untitled, c.1936

**Collage of paper, celluloid, feathers, string,
printed papers with watercolour on paper**

The Penrose Collection

Untitled (Collage), 1936

Collage and mixed media on paper

The Penrose Collection

Continues on next page.

Dragon Dog, 1938

Collage on paper

The Penrose Collection

Continues on next page.

Untitled Composition, 1949
Gouache and ink on paper
The Haines Collection



Continues on next page.

The Reaper, 1938

Gouache and leaf on paper

Tate: Purchased 1976

Here Agar has added a single leaf as the collage element to transform the composition. A design in ink and gouache depicts a mechanical reaper harvesting a crop and is anchored by this more physical element from the real world. The organic leaf is placed just off-centre, lower and tilting up to the right, countering with an upward movement the strongly painted downward black arcs. The leaf seems to have been intended as a conscious part of the design, rather than being added as a product of chance. Agar wrote 'the whole watercolour was intended to suggest a symbolic reaper with the flailing movement of the scythe-like concentric forms. The title indeed relates to time, the seasons and especially death the Great Reaper. The dead leaf being the hub of the whole'.

Continues on next page.

**Self-portrait with Dandy,
West Bay, Dorset, 1934
Drawing with collaged leaf
Private collection**

This is one of Agar's earliest works to make use of collage, a technique she used initially to enhance a pre-existing image. The work consists of a watercolour and pencil drawing which depicts the artist lying on her stomach on the beach near Bridport alongside Dandy, the bulldog owned by her partner Joseph Bard. A photograph of Bard reclining with Dandy at West Bay on holiday in 1934 is likely to have been the source for the work. A single dried leaf has been collaged atop the drawing and appears to have been added as an afterthought, rather than an intended part of the original composition; it is large in comparison to the size of the delicate drawing and extends over the border of the drawing yet has been carefully positioned around the artist's body.

Untitled (Landscape), c.1940

**Collage with horse chestnut leaf, vintage
photographic print and other elements with
coloured chalks and gouache**

Collection of Colin Heber-Percy



Continues on next page.

The Sower, 1937

Watercolour and gouache

The Ingram Collection

The Sower is one of a number of Agar's works of the 1930s to explore the themes of life, death, the passing of time and the cycle of the seasons. In this dream-like image, the figure of the Sower in the furrowed field can be seen as a metaphor for the beginning of life, sowing the seeds which will bring forth the crops. Along the bottom of the image lies a figure which may be the Green Man, spirit of the harvest, who often has the body of a faun - his cross hatched hoof reaches up to the landscape above, heralding the arrival of Spring.

Untitled, 1936

Watercolour on paper

Bradford Museums and Galleries

Untitled was executed the year of Agar's inclusion in the International Surrealist Exhibition and is a striking example of the unique style that she developed to combine both Cubist and Surrealist influences. The composition is framed within a rectangular outline and contains motifs which recur throughout her drawings, paintings and collages; the upper half is divided into sections and includes painted representations of newspaper and magazine cuttings, a matchbox, star and small portrait line drawings. An artist's palette occupies the lower half, while gestural red and ochre swirls have been used to unite both halves of the composition. Almost collage like in its making, Untitled shows the link between Agar's painterly practice and her passion for the happenstance of collage.

Untitled (Hand), 1936

Watercolour on paper

Private collection

The image of the hand is a symbol that Agar regularly employs across her collages, photographs and paintings. It may appear as a frottage, a collaged skeleton or x-ray of boney fingers, or as a glove, or a silhouette cut from a sheet of patterned or textured paper. Here though the hand is treated elegantly and straightforwardly – and of course – also Surreally. Agar's combination of unusual forms, her washes of contrasting colours and brief instances of texture, combined with her clean, simple black line create a tableau that seems to capture a moment in pause, a temporary reach toward an imagined reality.

Le Compotier aux Fruits, 1931

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Alongside *Movement in Space*, *Le Compotier aux Fruits* is one of Agar's most Cubist works and shares the same red, semi-circular markings at its centre. Agar expressed a particular admiration for the Cubist paintings of Juan Gris, and this painting is likely influenced by his still life works. The vertical format and flattened composition are especially reminiscent of Gris' *Still Life with Fruit Bowl and Mandolin, 1919*, yet the muted pastel colours, soft visible brushstrokes and curved forms denoting the body of the fruit bowl show Agar's interest in organic forms and the formation of her own unique style.

Movement in Space, 1931

Oil on canvas

J. Sheekey Restaurant www.j-sheekey.co.uk /

@jsheekeyldn

In 1929, keen to learn more about European painting, Agar moved to Paris, where she began painting lessons with the Czech Cubist, František Foltýn. She was beginning to think about non-figurative painting and enjoying her investigations through abstraction: 'I had begun to free myself from the cul-de-sac of representational painting by learning the principles of abstract painting, and experimenting with content as well as form.' Movement in Space is Agar's most Cubist work – and the only painting of this sort that survives unaltered. Foltýn's teachings are evident in this work, in the muted colour tones and flattened composition, though Agar's budding interest in organic shapes and embryonic forms is also clear.

The Bird. Two Lovers, 1931

Woodcut on Japan paper

The Court Gallery, Somerset

In 1931 Agar, Bard and the artist Leon Underwood founded a new journal called *The Island*, it was 'intended to be a quarterly magazine dedicated to the plastic arts, poetry and the imagination.' Agar contributed writing and woodcuts to all four issues which included essays, poetry and artworks by other creatives in their circle such as Gertrude Hermes, Catherine Carswell, Naomi Mitchinson, Henry Moore, Ezra Pound and even Mahatma Ghandi. In the first issue Agar included this small engraving, a semi-abstract composition that can be read either as a bird or as two figures intertwined. In order to play on the tension between flatness and decorative line, Agar uses scratching techniques to emphasise and gradiate between light and dark. Ultimately resulting in a taut fusion of abstract composition and symbolic subject matter.

Continues on next page.

Constructivist Composition, 1931

Crayon and pencil on paper

Gillian Jason Gallery

Constructivist Composition is perhaps one of Agar's most purely abstract works. The influence of the tutelage that Agar received from Czech painter František Foltýn – who taught her 'about sensitivity to form while trying to cultivate colour, planes and composition' – is particularly clear in the work's palette of blacks, whites and greys, as well as its taut composition. The work also reveals Agar's curiosity for organic shapes and variations of natural textures. Constructivist Composition is a rare and early work that demonstrates Agar's involvement and interest in the British abstract movement in the 1930s.

Dancers, n.d.

Pencil on paper

Redfern Gallery, London

Self-portrait in a Lamp, c.1930

Pencil and frottage on paper

Leeds Museums and Galleries



Continues on next page.

Joseph Bard, 1927

Pencil on paper

Private Collection



Continues on next page.

**Self-portrait: Eileen Looking Out Pencil,
watercolour and wash
Private Collection**



Continues on next page.

Joseph Bard in Brittany, 1927

Watercolour on paper

New Art Centre, Wiltshire

A Sea Serpent in Sark, 1930

(reworked 1987)

Mixed media on paper

Private collection



Continues on next page.

Rodney Thomas, 1927
Watercolour on paper
Redfern Gallery,
London



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Rodney Thomas at Portofino, 1927

Watercolour on panel

Private Collection

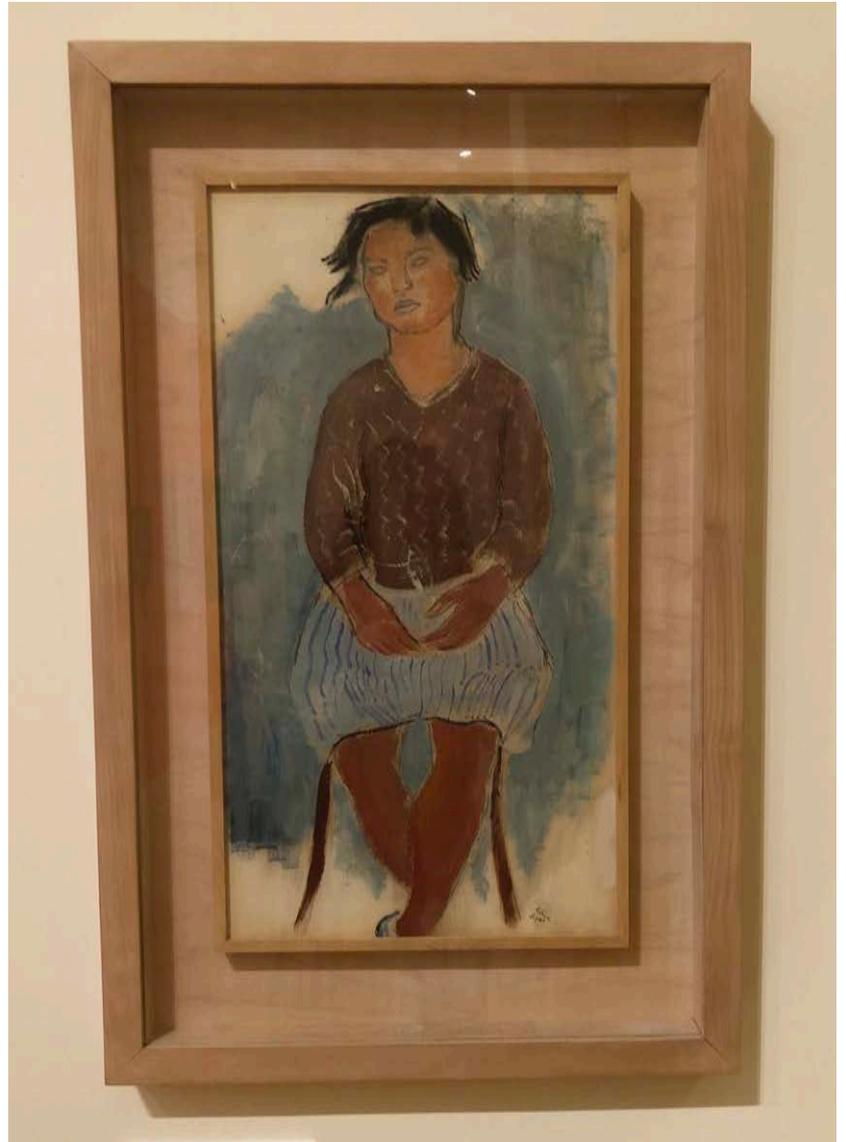


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The Italian Girl, 1927

Oil on paper

Private collection



Continues on next page.

Clockwise:

Untitled (Studio), 1929

Mixed media and collage on paper

Redfern Gallery, London

Self-portrait, 1925–30

Pen and ink

Private collection

Joseph Line Drawing, n.d.

Pencil on paper

Redfern Gallery, London

Joseph Bard, 1928

Ink and watercolour on paper

The Haines Collection

Standing Female Nude, 1930

Ink on paper

Private collection

Continues on next page.

Joseph Line Drawing, n.d.

Ink on paper

Redfern Gallery, London

In the late 1920s Agar was exploring her newfound artistic confidence and documenting the relationships and travels that inspired her. These intimate drawings and sketches reveal both her skill as a draftsman and her sensitivity to line and colour as well as her budding interest in abstraction. Across these works, her experiments with different styles, techniques, textures and tones reveal an artist intent of finding her own voice and harnessing the influence she took from social and emotional connections as well as travel and adventure.

(Red free-standing wall at the front of Gallery 1)

Mooma, 1927

Oil on canvas

Redfern Gallery, London



Continues on next page.

(Red free-standing wall at the front of Gallery 1)

Self-portrait, 1927

Oil on canvas

National Portrait Gallery, London

In 1925 following her education at The Slade, Agar, frustrated by its traditional teachings and embroiled in a rift with her parents, ran away to Cornwall and shaved her head 'to celebrate my new freedom!' The same year she destroyed the majority of her work to date, dissatisfied with its development. She returned to London in 1926 and moved into a flat alongside her new lover Joseph Bard. Here, she was able to paint with a newfound self assurance: 'everything I had done before was academic in approach, careful of other men's teaching.' She created Self-portrait to represent her burgeoning confidence. Painted in thick impasto, it has a fresh, sunlit look, celebrating Agar's new approach to expression and her self-reliance as a worthy painter: 'I had thrown off the shackles and

started a new life, and I painted what may be considered my first successful work.

(Red free-standing wall at the front of Gallery 1)

Sleeping Head of Joseph, 1929

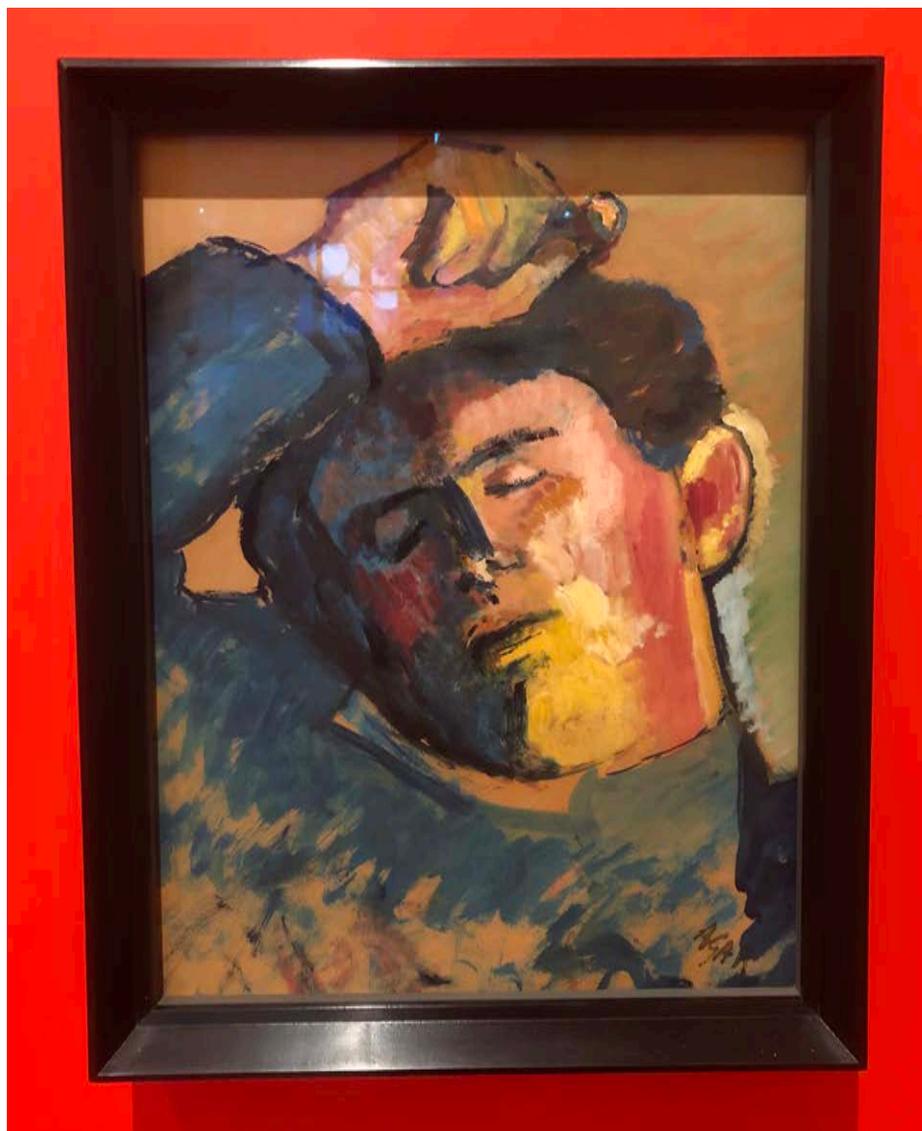
Oil on board

Redfern Gallery, London

In 1926, at a party in London, Agar met the Hungarian writer, Joseph Bard. She described the encounter as 'the shock effect of a putting out of place, creating the sharpness of a new focus.' And so began one of the most generative and enduring connections of Agar's life. Their relationship was somewhat unconventional for their time, they didn't marry until 1940 and maintained separate flats and studios – albeit adjacent to one another – for much of their lives together. But Bard was incredibly supportive of Agar's artistic practice and quickly became her constant travel companion, muse, sounding board, confidant and lover. Agar made countless sketches, photographs and paintings of Bard

Continues on next page.

throughout her career, many of which can be seen here. This intimate painting is one of her earliest and reveals the tenderness and affection she felt for him.



Continues on next page.

(Yellow free-standing wall at the front of Gallery 1)

The Autobiography of an Embryo 1933–4

Oil on board

Tate: Purchased 1987

This early masterpiece is demonstrative of Agar's thinking of the early 1930s. It depicts an eternal cycle of renewal and evolution, with a complex, rhythmic energy that repeats and echoes across the four carefully organised panels, read left to right. Described by Agar as 'a celebration of life, not only a single one, but life in general on this particular and moving planet', the painting contains Etruscan symbols, shells, wings, plant like structures, fossils and embryonic forms, combined with modern elements, such as a brick wall or sketchy heads, held together in harmony like a finely tuned collage. After being exhibited in the Ninth Exhibition of the National Society of Painters and Sculptors at the Royal Institute Galleries in London in 1938, the painting remained in storage until it was

Continues on next page.

rediscovered by Andrew Lambirth in 1987 in Agar's attic, and became the centrepiece of her retrospective exhibition at Birch and Conran Gallery later that year.

Archive Vitrine (front of gallery 1)

1 Joseph Bard reading, 1928, pencil on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

2 Early photograph of Eileen Agar and Joseph Bard, n.d., black-and-white photograph. Redfern Gallery, London

3 Photograph of International Surrealist Exhibition showing *Quadriga*, at the New Burlington Galleries, London, 1936, black and-white photograph. Private collection

4 Early self-portrait drawings, 1922, ink on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

5 Photograph of Joseph Bard with Dandy at Bridport, 1934, black and-white photograph. Private collection

6 Horse head cut-out used for *Quadriga*, n.d., black-and-white magazine cut-out. Private collection

Continues on next page.

7 Animal sketches, n.d., ink on paper. Private collection

8 Invalid Appetites, n.d., collage. Private collection

9 The Island, edited by Eileen Agar, Joseph Bard and Leon Underwood, Vol 1, No.s 1, 2&3, 4. The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA

10 Vivos Voco, 1931 woodcut in The Island, Vol 1, Nos 2&3. Pallant House Gallery Bookshop

11 Family Trio collage, n.d., woodcut and collage on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

12 The Bird. Two Lovers wood block, 1931, Redfern Gallery, London

13 Family Trio wood block, n.d., Redfern Gallery, London

Continues on next page.

14 Photograph of The Autobiography of an Embryo at an early stage, c.1933, black-and-white photograph.

Private collection

15 Photograph of clock designed by Rodney Thomas in Agar's studio, n.d., black-and-white photograph. Private collection

16 Photograph of now lost painting entitled Beauty Spot, n.d., black and-white photograph. Private collection



Continues on next page.

(Free standing sculptures)

Angel of Anarchy, 1936–40

Plaster, fabric, shells, beads, diamante stones and other materials

**Tate: Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery
1983**

This is the second version of an earlier sculpture with the same title, which was sadly lost. Both sculptures began as plaster-cast heads of Joseph Bard. When Agar initially saw the casts she was dismayed by the 'deadness' of the white plaster – 'it looked like a death sculpture.' So she adorned this version with furs, embroidered silks, gemstones, seashells and ostrich feathers. While some elements suggest facial features, others are decorative accessories. Similarly, the patterned textile is both a skin and a blindfold, creating ambiguous allusions to seduction and submissiveness, as well as a blinkering of Europe's uncertain political future. Agar stated that with this new work she wanted to create something 'totally different, more astonishing,

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powerful ... more malign.' It suggests the foreboding and uncertainty that she felt about the future in the late 1930s.

Angel of Mercy, 1934

Collage and watercolour on plaster

The Estate of the late Dr. Jeffrey Sherwin and the Sherwin Family

This second sculpture, Angel of Mercy was also modelled on Joseph Bard and forms a companion work to Angel of Anarchy. Dated 1934, it is now accepted that Agar likely worked on the two at the same time, completing Angel of Mercy around 1939. In effect, Agar was turning the Surrealist tendency of making a beautiful woman into a muse on its head, taking Bard for hers – both her good angel and her bad one – mercy and anarchy. Mercy is less a fetish figure and more benign than Anarchy, reminiscent of Agar's earlier decorative lines and gentler hues, complemented by soft, humorous additions – a dice in the nose, the star of the chin and the veil of eyelashes that cover his

Continues on next page.

eyes. Though Mercy may appear less glamorous than Anarchy, he holds more mystery and intimacy.

Continues on next page.

(Free standing sculpture)

Marine Object, 1939

Terracotta, horn, bone and shells

Tate: Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery

1990

Always on the lookout for flotsam and jetsam, in 1939, while staying in the French seaside town of Carqueiranne with Bard, Agar saw 'a fisherman cursing because he had brought up a Greek Amphora in his nets and it had torn his nets [...] and I said to him "I'll have that". The fragmented amphora, with barnacles and seashells attached became the basis of the assemblage Marine Object, to which she added a ram's horn from Cumberland, a dried starfish, crucifix fish skeleton, a shell and a couple of other sea-encrustations and 'it was short work making Marine Object'.

(Free standing sculpture)

Fish Basket, 1965

Wicker, shell and wood on cardboard base

Tate: Purchased 1993

Agar had been an avid beachcomber since the 1930s, composing countless sculptural works and collages from the flotsam and jetsam that she found washed up on the shore. In contrast to many of her Surrealist contemporaries, who acquired their 'found objects' in flea markets or used mundane mass-produced objects, Agar often preferred to find organic bounty on the beach. This liminal site, existing on the boundary between land and ocean, was the ideal location for her to discover, by chance, naturally Surreal objects thrown up by the sea. Some, Agar showed unmodified and as she found them, though others were assembled into works such as Fish Basket, comprised of a wicker basket, a painted cardboard cut-out of shrimp and a two bulbous shells, all celebrated with a fanfare of painted cardboard flourishes.

Continues on next page.

Gallery 9

This guide begins with the first wall label to the left of the entrance to Gallery 9 and continues in a clockwise direction around the space.

(Wall text)

Nature as a sculptor:

Agar's assemblage and photography

Agar was fascinated by the natural world, she writes 'you see the shape of a tree, the way a pebble falls or is formed, and you are astounded to discover that dumb nature makes an effort to speak to you.' She sought out sculptural forms in nature, which she then choreographed into fantastical collages and sculptures. Her assemblages have a tentative quality as well as a visual playfulness. When asked about their seeming fragility she commented that they had been found 'at the behest of chance and went that way also'. Many of her objects are now known only from photographs, and records show that she repurposed several of them. In 1936 Agar travelled to Ploumanach, France where she was struck by the coastal rock formations. Emphasising her belief that the Surreal is formed by nature, Agar described the rocks as 'sculpted by the

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sea, that master worker of all time, as if nature had arranged a show of sculpture in the open air.' Keen to document the extraordinary rocks, Agar travelled to the nearest town to buy a camera. She purchased a Rolleiflex square-format camera that would become 'a constant companion'. From this point on photography began to assume a greater role in her practice. Her photographs show her curious eye and reflect the subjects which endured throughout her career; landscapes, seascapes, shipwrecks, natural and human-made found objects, alongside portraits of her partner Joseph Bard, and friends such as Nusch and Paul Éluard, Dora Maar, Lee Miller, Roland Penrose and Pablo Picasso.

Clockwise:

Oval stone with face painted on it, n.d.

Acrylic paint on stone

Tate Archive

Sculpture consisting of a vertebrae glued to a stone,
n.d.

Bone and stone

Tate Archive

Sculpture consisting of a piece of coral glued to a
plastic tripod, n.d.

Coral and plastic

Tate Archive

Painted Shell, n.d

Acrylic on shell

Tate Archive

Sphere of bleached coral, n.d.

Continues on next page.

Coral

Redfern Gallery, London

Ceramic handleless cup decorated with a geometric pattern in black on a pale brown background, n.d.

Ceramic and paint

Tate Archive

Vision of Rhythm, 1945

Iron and candles

The Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection of Dada and Surrealist Art in the Israel Museum

Vol de Nuit, 1950s

Snake vertebrae, shells and metal on wire

Private collection

Sculpture consisting of a stone coloured orange and wrapped in small vertebrae strung on thick string, n.d.

Acrylic paint or felt-tip pen on stone, bone and string

Tate Archive

Continues on next page.

Large green coral n.d.

Coral

Redfern Gallery, London

Sculpture consisting of a nautilus shell glued to a clam shell, n.d.

Shells

Tate Archive

Sculpture resembling a bunch of grapes on a plinth, 1973

Wood and metal

Tate Archive

Whale vertebrae, n.d.

Bone

Redfern Gallery, London

Sculpture consisting of two carved cylindrical objects mounted to a block of marble, n.d.

Continues on next page.

Wood, plastic, marble and acrylic

Tate Archive

Crescent shaped wood carving, n.d.

Wood

Tate Archive

Homage to the Scissor, c.1968

Metal, plastic, wood and chain

Redfern Gallery, London

Stone with naturally occurring face, n.d

Stone

Redfern Gallery, London

Stone painted green with blue star painted on it, 1986

Acrylic on stone

Tate Archive

Sculpture consisting of a shell stuck on top of sea urchin mounted on a base made out of woven bark, n.d.

Continues on next page.

Shell and wood

Tate Archive

Continues on next page.

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**Photograph of Agar wearing Ceremonial Hat for
Eating Bouillabaisse, 1936**

Photograph

Private collection



Continues on next page.

Video of Agar wearing Ceremonial Hat for Eating Bouillabaisse, 1936

British Pathé

Hats were a point of fascination for Agar, having grown up witnessing her mother's enduring passion for 'enormous constructions of straw, velvet or fur-like frigates under sail or birds on the wing.' This passion likely inspired her Ceremonial Hat for Eating Bouillabaisse, which she described as 'a sort of Archimboldo headgear for the fashion conscious', formed from a circular cork basket painted blue, topped with various found objects such as a fishnet, a lobster's tail, a starfish, and pieces of bone and coral. The hat was added to and transformed throughout the years and survives as a rare example of a Surrealist-inspired fashion object, exemplifying Agar's insistence on glamour and style as a form of resistance within the machismo of Surrealism. The final design is now in the collection of the V&A alongside Agar's other known millinery creation Glove Hat (1936), a straw hat with a

pair of Schiaparelli kidskin gloves with painted red fingernails attached.

Continues on next page.

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Clockwise:

Photographs of rocks in Ploumanach

Photograph of 'Le Lapin' rock in Ploumanach

Continues on next page.

Photograph of rocks in Ploumanach

Photograph of 'bum and thumb' rock in Ploumanach

Photograph of rocks in Ploumanach

Photograph of rocks in Ploumanach

All 1936 All Black-and-white exhibition prints from original negative All Tate Archive The majority of the carefully composed black-and-white photographs Agar took at Ploumanach, Brittany are tightly framed to isolate individual rocks and highlight their creases, folds and incisions. Pairs of rocks are often counterbalanced or stand aloft in dialogue with each other. The outlines of the rocks are sharply delineated, and their undulations accentuated by dramatic shadows cast by the summer sun, which, combined with the low vantage point and absence of human presence, emphasises both the monumentality and timelessness of the rocks.

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While Agar describes the limb-like appearance of 'a great buttock ending in a huge thumb [...] a gigantic head tuned with organ pipes' and 'a foot rearing up like a dolmen', she did not anthropomorphise the rocks further by naming them, aside from the rock she called 'bum and thumb' and the one the locals refer to as 'Le Lapin'. The fact that Agar resisted naming the metamorphic rocks and chose to record them through the mechanical medium of photography, rather than pencil or watercolour sketches, as she had captured landscapes on previous trips, results in images with a more objective and enigmatic quality.

Archive Vitrine 1

1 Photograph of Agar wearing Ceremonial Hat for Eating Bouillabaisse, n.d., black-and white photograph. Private collection

2 Photograph of Ceremonial Hat for Eating Bouillabaisse, n.d., black and-white photograph. Private collection

3 Photograph of Agar with now lost assemblage, n.d., black-and-white photograph. Private collection

4 Arson: Part One of A Surrealist Manifestation, 1942, ed. Toni del Renzio. The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA

5 Photograph of Phantoms of the Sea, 1948, black-and-white photograph. Private collection

6 Photograph of *The Wings of Augury*, 1948, black-and-white photograph. Private collection

7 *Surrealist Objects and Poems*, 1937, exhibition catalogue showing the first *Angel of Anarchy*, published by The London Gallery. The Murray Family Collection UK and USA

8 *Surrealism Today*, exhibition invitation, 1940, Zwemmer Gallery, London. Private collection

9 Agar's fish shaped paintbrush pots, n.d., ceramic. Redfern Gallery, London

10 *Album Surréaliste*, 1937, exhibition catalogue for The International Surrealist Exhibition, Japan. The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA

11 Brochure for An Exhibition of Surrealism, at Gordon Fraser's Gallery, Portugal Place, Cambridge, 1937, cover design by Graham Sutherland. Private collection

Continues on next page.

12 Signed booklet of poems by Paul Éluard, dedicated to Eileen Agar. Redfern Gallery, London

13 Exhibition booklet, Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, 1938, Galerie Robert, Amsterdam. Private collection

14 Photograph of Agar with fellow exhibitors at the International Surrealist Exhibition, 1936, New Burlington Galleries, London. Photographer unknown. The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA

Archive Vitrine 2

1 Eileen Agar, photograph of Picasso on the beach at Mougins, 1937, black-and-white photograph. Private collection

2 Photo postcard with image of Lee Miller and Roland Penrose in Mougins in 1937. The Penrose Collection

3 Photograph of Agar in Mougins, 1937, black-and-white photograph, photographer likely to be Joseph Bard. Private collection

4 Photograph of Agar in sheer dress on a rooftop in the outskirts of Cannes, near Mougins, 1937, black-and-white photograph, photographer likely to be Joseph Bard. Private collection

5 Letter from Man Ray to Roland Penrose following a visit to Cornwall and London with Agar and Bard, 1937. The Murray Family Collection, UK and USA

Continues on next page.

6 Eileen Agar, photograph of Lee Miller and Roland Penrose on the beach, 1937, black-and white exhibition print from original negative. Tate Archive

7 Eileen Agar, photograph of Paul Éluard and Pablo Picasso on the beach, 1937, black-and white exhibition print from original negative. Tate Archive

8 Eileen Agar, photograph of Dora Maar, Nusch Éluard, Pablo Picasso and Paul Éluard on the beach, 1937, black- and white exhibition print from original negative. Tate Archive

9 Three rock frottage sketches, n.d. Private collection

Clockwise:

Photograph of trees and leaves, n.d.

Photograph of a figurehead by a harbour, 1934

Photograph of a stone being reset n.d.

Photograph of a beached tree, 1936

Photograph of a zebra skin 1930–1940s

Photograph of coffin lids, 1937

Photograph of daisies, shells and stones, 1930s

Photograph of a misshapen tree n.d.

Photograph of a statue of Madonna and Child, 1938–9

Photograph of two surreal birds making water, 1937

Continues on next page.

Photograph of a row of foldable chairs with shadows visible behind c.1930

Photograph of a shell growth, 1930s

Photograph of a haystack with ladders leaning against it, 1940s

Photograph of a shipwreck at Gurnard's Head, Cornwall, 1961

All Black-and-white exhibition prints from original negatives All from Tate Archive

This selection of photographs dating from the mid 1930s to 1961, taken on trips throughout the UK and abroad attest to the sustained and renewed influence of travel on Agar's practice. Following her trip to Ploumanach, Agar visited the Neolithic site of Avebury, Wiltshire, which was undergoing restoration.

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Photograph of a stone being reset depicts one of the large stones tightly bound and anchored by ropes, chains, pulleys and wooden beam in order to re-erect it. This composition is echoed in Photograph of haystack with ladders leaning against it where Agar captures a densely packed haystack held in a state of tension between humans and nature. Agar's photographs also imbue static objects with animism through carefully framed compositions. Photograph of a beached tree (1936) depicts a fallen tree trunk on the beach at Perros-Guirec, France, its branches reaching out across the sand like a kind of supersized sea creature, while Photograph of a misshapen tree focuses on a tree which leans forward, weighed down by a bulbous growth embedded in its trunk. In Photograph of a figurehead by a harbour, Agar captures a female figurehead with a worried gaze and clenched fist, dislodged from her ship and leaning against a wall with the Dorset harbour visible in the background. Photograph of a statue of Madonna and child depicts a decaying wooden figure of the Virgin Mary standing in a doorway holding her

Continues on next page.

infant son looking towards the entrance, as if the two are waiting to be ushered inside. A number of photographs capture natural motifs which recur throughout Agar's paintings, collages and assemblages, such as Photograph with trees and leaves, Photograph of a shell growth, in which shells protrude outwards, almost enveloped by the dense surrounding foliage, and Photograph of daisies, shells and stones, where the frame is filled with dense layers of leaves, grass and crisp daisies bathed in sunlight, with the face of a cat peeping out from the shadows underneath.

Lee Miller

Eileen Agar: Brighton, 1937, 1937

Photograph

Falmouth Art Gallery

The Surrealist artist and World War Two correspondent, Lee Miller was a close friend of Agar and the pair often travelled together and shared ideas. Miller's artistic practice was grounded in the medium of photography and her unique visual style documented the sights and landscapes she encountered on her travels around the world in a manner influenced by a Surrealist eye for the uncanny or strange. For this portrait Miller photographed Agar's shadow on one of the columns of the Brighton Pavilion. Agar herself wrote that when Picasso saw the picture, he demanded a print, delighted with the image of her 'pregnant with a camera, transformed by a Rolleiflex.'

Gallery 8

This guide begins with the first wall label to the right of the entrance to Gallery 8 and continues in a clockwise direction around the space, before moving on to the free standing wall.

(Wall Text)

Wartime anxieties

In 1939, the onset of war interrupted Agar's artistic activity significantly. Though a pacifist, she enlisted in the war effort, volunteering in a canteen on Savile Row. Agar and Bard also served as Fire Watchers on night duty and in their London home they hosted friends fleeing persecution in Europe, or newly homeless due to the Blitz. Remaining in London allowed Agar to keep her studio, though she 'felt it impossible to concentrate on painting when you could turn to look out of the window and see a Messerschmitt flying low over the treetops.' She found collage – with its more political foundations and direct symbolism – a medium she could maintain. Her work of this period is dense and loaded, filled with desire, anxiety and a sense of urgency. When the war ended Agar 'felt like something new and marvellous ought to happen' but she was 'exhausted and humdrum, more dispirited than usual.' She describes

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this period as a physical and spiritual famine. Yearning for change but with travel outside of the country difficult, she visited Cornwall and the Lake District to replenish her imagination. Slowly Agar returned to painting as if 'renewing a belief in life itself'. Her works from the late 1940s reveal a cautious optimism, often employing a gentler pastel colour palette to depict layered, stencilled and painted forms. These works feel like a wary step towards celebration, and, following years of rationing, a hopeful nod to more plentiful days ahead.

Piece with strings, 1941

Collage and mixed media on paper

Redfern Gallery, London



Continues on next page.

Abundance, 1942

Oil on canvas

Private collection

One of Agar's rare wartime paintings, *Abundance* combines the spirals of two nautilus shells, a waning moon, splashes of leaves and vines, a wheel-like yellow sunshine and two pairs of dancing feet, with geometric stripes, zigzags, checkerboards and starry forms, all pulled together in a raucous mix of earthy browns and blues. In the middle of the composition, two faces in profile look toward one another, a single hand reaching between them. This is a highly charged work, filled with noisy festivity and evoking a feeling of exuberance. Created during the midst of wartime rationing while Agar was volunteering in a canteen, here she harnesses her spirit of play to imagine an entirely different reality, one filled with feasting, plenty and joy.

Bread Basket, 1943

Collage and mixed media on paper

Redfern Gallery, London



Continues on next page.

Erotic Landscape, 1942

Collage and mixed media on paper

Private collection

Despite the deep apprehension she felt as a result of the war, Agar embraced the medium of collage and its political and overt origins: 'how does one communicate with any subtlety when the world is being deafened by explosions?' In 1942 she had a solo exhibition at Redfern Gallery where she showed 24 new collages, one of these was Erotic Landscape. It depicts a cut-out photograph of a nude woman, surrounded by a fanfare of plant and marine life, wave like drawings and twisting, cellular tendrils. A girthy tree trunk grows sideways in the top left corner and a small spikey, black triangle peeps out of the woman's crotch. The work is dense and loaded, here desire feels passionate and urgent. It is as though Agar is trying to summon all that is sensual and natural as a way of surmounting the struggles of war.

Aurora, 1942

Watercolour, bodycolour and coloured chalk on paper

Private collection



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Abstract Composition with Fish, n.d.

Watercolour and gouache

Private collection



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Lake District, 1944

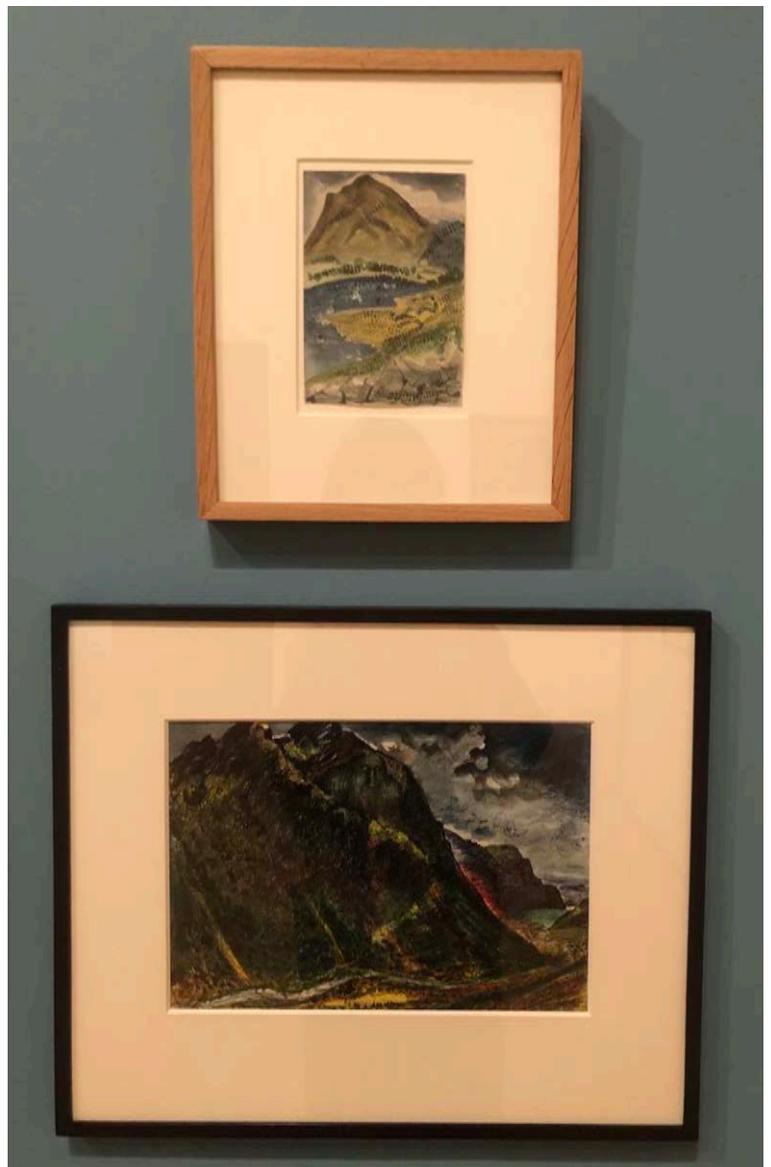
Watercolour on paper

Redfern Gallery, London

At the end of the war, Agar felt exhausted and trapped amongst the gloom of London. Travel had always been such an important stimulus for her to make work so she and Bard embarked on a number of journeys within the UK. Together they visited Cornwall, Northern Ireland and Cumbria where she made these three watercolour paintings. Unusually for the period, Agar depicts the landscape before her with little to no abstraction, rather she presents these three solemn scenes in a way that reveals the heartbreak she felt as a result of the war, simply accentuated here and there with moments of frottage or experiments with texture.

Lake District, 1944
Watercolour on paper
Redfern Gallery, London

Cumbria, 1944
Watercolour on paper
Redfern Gallery,
London



Continues on next page.

The Dancer, c.1951

Coloured crayon, black ink and watercolour on paper

Austin / Desmond Fine Art



Continues on next page.

Birth of the Minotaur, 1947

Ink and gouache on paper

Private collection

Here Agar combines typically Surrealist references with her passion for classical mythology in a densely worked painting that seems to churn with colours, whorls, leaves, clouds and shells. In Greek mythology the Minotaur – body of a man and head of a bull – was the offspring of the oracular goddess Pasiphae, wife of King Minos, and a beautiful bull sent to Minos by Poseidon, god of the sea, for sacrifice. Minos failed to sacrifice the bull so to punish him Poseidon made Pasiphae fall in love with it. Agar presents the product of that love; the Birth of the Minotaur is the result of the union of the sky and the sea, ensuring fertility of the land. The Minotaur was also one of the most recognisable tropes of Surrealism. The Surrealist journal *Minotaure* was founded in 1933 by Albert Skira and would run until 1939, coming to an end as war overtook Europe.

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Demeter, 1949

Mixed media on panel

Private collection

In this work Agar explores her ongoing interest in classical mythology and its portrayal of women, as well as her response to years of wartime rationing. Demeter is the ancient Greek goddess of the harvest; she presides over grains and fertility and was often worshipped more generally as a goddess of the earth. In Agar's depiction she floats amidst flourishes of wheat, florals, stars and spirals, a celebration of new life. She also – mischievously – lifts her drape to reveal her bottom, adorned with flowers. Here Agar allows the goddess to reclaim her own eroticism without any of the mystification that usually surrounds images of her, now she is in control of her own nudity, and her own desire.

(Wall Text)

Post-war experiments: automatism and frottage

Over the next ten years Agar was 'still aware of a sense of despondency and threatened by morbidity'. She travelled as much as possible, gradually working herself out of a sense of gloom. In 1953 she was invited to spend the winter in Tenerife, a trip which became 'a watershed in my life' sparking her creativity and emboldening her to return year upon year. 'I had been too long cut off from the world of nature, too cooped up, too cribbed and confined, and the relief of finding one's roots responding to the quickening pulse of vegetation, the vast mountain-scapes, the sea horizons, all this made me fall in love with that mountainous dew-drop in the ocean and I revived and could work again.' By the mid-1950s, Agar was enjoying a successful period of painting, travelling and exhibiting and had begun to feel like herself again: 'surely room must be made for joy in this world?' Her

Continues on next page.

work was beginning to blur the divisions between collage, drawing and painting and she continued to experiment with Surrealist techniques such as frottage, automatism and decalcomania. Some of Agar's most striking uses of automatism, or spontaneous painting, can be found in a small selection of poured paintings. Here she uses oil and enamel paints to create portraits in loose outlines, fluid drips and swirling backgrounds.

Portrait of the Artist's Mother c.1960

Oil and acrylic on board

The Haines Collection

Agar had a complicated relationship with her mother from childhood. Her mother was frustrated by Agar's interest in art and would have preferred her daughter to have been a debutante, wife and eventually a mother herself. The pair remained in contact until her mother died in 1942 but their priorities always diverged. That said, Agar often incorporated elements inspired by her mother into her works; her love of textiles, embroidery and precious stones featured in many sculptures and paintings – as did her fondness for hats. This is her only portrait of her mother and it feels heavy and loaded, the sinuous drips and trails of poured paint are dense and disordered, perhaps depicting the conflicted feelings she felt towards her mother and family.

Profiles, 1940

Oil and enamel on canvas

Private collection, London



Continues on next page.

Head of Dylan Thomas, 1960

Oil and acrylic on board

Tate: Purchased 1962

One of Agar's most striking uses of automatism can be found in this small portrait of her friend Dylan Thomas, painted seven years after he had died and 30 years after she had made a sketch of him at a party. She recalls: 'a ruddy faced cherub with a snub nose and no chin... squatted on the floor and began reciting limericks – a deep flow of bawdy nonsense that kept everyone enthralled.' Head of Dylan Thomas uses the portrait in- profile- style already employed in several earlier works, though here Agar experiments with spontaneous painting to outline Thomas' face in fluid white strokes and drips, atop a canvas full of red, purple and black abstract motifs. The flowing compositional style is conceivably a deliberate homage to the free spirit of Thomas himself.

Portrait, c.1949

Oil on board

Redfern Gallery, London

One of the most expressive of Agar's post-war 'poured paintings' Portrait also feels more emotionally charged than some of the other automatic paintings that she made at this time, its twisting drips and trails are thick and tangled, marbled and puddled, with hectic overdrawing. The central figure – which could likely be Agar herself – somehow resembles an ancient Greek Tanagra ceramic. Tanagra figures were appreciated for their naturalistic and expressive features, they depicted mortal women – rather than goddesses – lightly wrapped in cloaks and silks often holding wreaths. Through this reference, Agar presents herself as earthly and human, her eyes, simple spirals, looking out of the painting with bright intent to a more hopeful future.

Pollen, 1960

Mixed media on canvas

Private collection

At first glance this work may appear as Agar's most abstract, however it also reveals her enduring interest in the natural world and its categorisation – often on a molecular level. The four central forms at the top and at the bottom of the painting resemble microscope images of different pollen grains – the fertilising agent of most plants – presented here in floral pinks and yellows, underpinned by deep earthy browns and blacks. Created using layers of enamel paint, frottage and stencilling, with whole areas of paint wiped or scraped away from the surface, this work brims with natural forms and textures, demonstrating Agar's celebration of the natural world in even its smallest details.

An Exceptional Occurrence, 1950

Oil on canvas on board

**National Museum of Wales, by permission of the
Derek Williams Trust**

In this joyous painting, two unidentifiable sea creatures occupy the composition, floating against a textured, vivid blue background reminiscent of the sea. The amorphous forms are comprised of multicoloured layers of poured paint, while certain elements such as the two geometric eyes of the creature on the right are rendered more intentionally. The title may allude to a chance subaquatic encounter, or the relationship achieved by combining the technique of automatic painting with a more composed design.

Figures Underwater, 1962

Oil on board

Redfern Gallery, London

The New Planet, 1963

Acrylic on canvas

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent



Continues on next page.

Poet and His Muse, 1959

Oil on canvas

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

Created in 1959, when Agar was experiencing a renewed joy in painting, *Poet and his Muse* exemplifies Agar's ability to combine Surrealist influences with geometric pattern and the overlapping planes of Cubism. This work also celebrates her enduring friendships with a number of significant poets and writers including Pound, Paul Éluard, Dylan Thomas and Ezra Pound. The subject of the artist and their muse appears regularly throughout art history and has traditionally been presented as a serene encounter between a male artist and his female muse. Agar's version, however, conveys a more progressive sensibility, implying the sources of artistic inspiration are energetic, intoxicating and without gender .

Orpheus and his Muse, 1959–60

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Orpheus was considered the best musician and poet in Greek mythology. Through his music he was able to charm animals and make trees dance. He was also able to convince Hades, god of the underworld, to free his deceased wife and muse, Eurydice, with the one stipulation that he was not to turn around and watch her as she exited Hades' kingdom. However, Orpheus defied Hades' instruction and lost Eurydice's for a second time, leaving him grief-stricken and unable to sing. Agar presents the lovers in a happier time, through geometric pattern and overlapping planes, the pair seem to float, perhaps in a boat, in an equivalent and harmonious union that celebrates the power of love and creativity.

Alice with Lewis Carroll, 1961

Oil on canvas

Private collection

From her youth, Agar had acknowledged a tradition of a kind of proto-Surrealism in the UK which she saw as a 'a nation predisposed to the expression of dream states and the unconscious mind.' She cited the work of William Blake, Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll as precursors to the development of Surrealism in Europe and even described Carroll as 'a prophet of Surrealism'. The figure of Carroll's Alice was important to her and she depicts her here as larger than her creator, crowned with leaves and playing-card suits, surrounded by clouds and flourishes of flowers, swirls, checks and zigzags in richly layered Surreal landscape: 'Alice is untouchable and eternal, with a mammalian brain and a deep sense of the wonderful world we live in.'

Aztec Dream, 1970

Acrylic on canvas

Private collection



Continues on next page.

(Vitrine at the end of Gallery 8)

Archive Vitrine

1 Eight late sketches, n.d., felt tip, oil-pastel, pencil, ink and collage on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

2 Two Eileen Agar retrospective exhibition catalogues, one showing Homage to Braque, Brooke Street Gallery, London, 1964. Private collection

3 Two collaged exhibition invitations, Eileen Agar: Cumberland Landscapes, Redfern Gallery, London 1944. Private collection

4 Hand and Objects, n.d. watercolour on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

5 Eileen Agar: Recent Paintings, exhibition brochure, Hanover Gallery, London, 1949. Private collection

Continues on next page.

6 Eileen Agar exhibition brochure, Hanover Gallery, London, 1951. Private collection

7 Eileen Agar retrospective exhibition invitation, Commonwealth Gallery, London, 1971. The Murray Family Collection UK and USA

8 Eileen Agar retrospective exhibition catalogue, Commonwealth Gallery, London, 1971. The Murray Family Collection UK and USA

9 Eileen Agar: Recent Oil Paintings and Gouaches, Leger Galleries exhibition brochure, 1947. Private collection

10 Fish Circus, n.d., felt tip pen drawing on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

11 Sunset Seagull, 1983, felt tip on paper. Redfern Gallery, London

Continues on next page.

12 Pigeon Post, 1967, collage. Private collection

13 Eileen Agar: The Fruit of Winter, hand annotated
New Art Centre exhibition invite, 1979. Private
collection

14 Orde Eliason, contact sheet from Eileen Agar
photoshoot in 1985 featuring the cover image for Agar's
autobiography, black-and-white photographs. Private
collection

15 Photograph of Agar with Ithell Colquhoun, Edith
Rimington, Julian Trevelyan and other Surrealists,
1970s, black-and white photograph. The Murray Family
Collection UK and USA

Spider Woman, 1983

Crayon and collage on paper

Private collection

This small collage is thought to be a playful portrait of Gala Dali, muse and wife of Salvador Dali, whose nickname was 'spider woman'. Agar has collaged sap green plastic trees, plants and bushes to articulate a desert-like orange and purple speckled plain, over which looms the personage of the title. Agar depicts a large head in profile, with a beady eye and heart-shaped brain full of black squares which rest upon a thin neck and shoulders extending into arms in the form of a green and yellow propeller with black plastic spiders for hands at the tip of each end.

Clockwise:

Rock 3

Rock 10

Rock 7

Rock 8

Rock 9

Rock 2

Rock 6

Rock 4

Rock 12

Rock 5

Continues on next page.

Rock 11

All 1985 All acrylic on canvas All Redfern Gallery, London In 1985, Agar returned to the photographs she had taken in Ploumanach almost fifty years earlier. For an exhibition at New Art Centre in London the same year, she presented an intrepid series of hallucinatory drawings and paintings inspired by these images, 'so strong that they had imprinted themselves on my unconscious to be awakened decades later from their slumbers and appear in paint.' In these works she makes striking colour choices, jarring blues against browns, oranges and greens: her compositions are bold in their departure from the source imagery as she shifts perspective and focus, causing the rocks to loom over their landscape like anthropomorphised giants. Agar's Rock series thus represents a remarkable late expression of Agar's inimitable aesthetic sensibility – a series of works which look back to her past life and reflect on the force of imagination.

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This Pinky Coloured Mount, 1978

Crayon and collage on paper

Long and Ryle, London



Continues on next page.

Untitled, 1979-80

Acrylic on canvas

Private collection



Continues on next page.

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Untitled, 1979–81

Acrylic on canvas

Private collection

One of Agar's largest, late paintings, this work demonstrates her skill and dexterity with the medium of acrylic. Within the tight but harmonious composition passages of bright translucencies meet blocks of opaque blacks, browns and greens, as well as geometric stripes, spots and zigzags and Agar's now characteristic silhouettes of fish, hands, flowers and faces. The large central figure – with the double face – resembles Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and transitions, who was usually depicted as having two faces looking in opposite directions, one towards the past and the other towards the future. Created when Agar was over 80 years of age, perhaps this work is a reflection on the many transitions of her life.

(Wall Text)

Late painting and the joy of acrylic

In 1958, Agar moved to a much larger studio. For the first time she could paint at a scale she hadn't been able to before. Soon after, in 1965, she was introduced to acrylic paint. She found acrylic to be 'very versatile, it can be used as impasto, with a palette knife or a thin wash. I had found an ideal medium, and I wanted to both master and stretch it.' The large paintings she made during the 1970s and 80s are tightly composed, layered works that emulate collage but are created entirely in paint. The now characteristic Agar motifs appear – shells, birds, fossils, hands, silhouetted forms and foliage – all skillfully incorporated into her meticulously arranged canvases. Agar published her autobiography in 1989 and was made a Royal Academician in 1990. During the final years of her life, she continued to work every day, finding continual joy in her art: 'life's meaning is lost without the spirit of

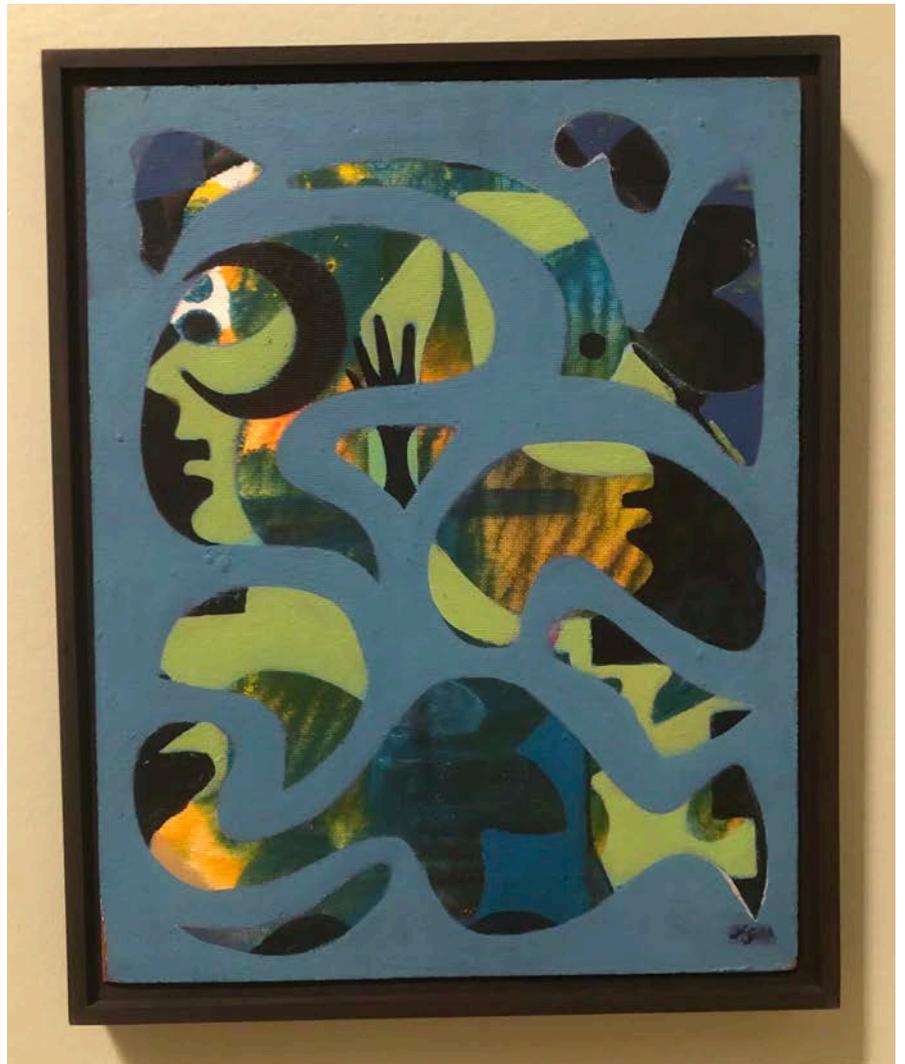
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play. In play all that is lovely and soaring in the human spirit strives to find expression. In play the mind is prepared to enter a world where different laws apply, to be free.' Her primary interests endured throughout her career, all the while following the two parallel paths of abstraction and Surrealism: 'the two movements that interested me most. I see nothing incompatible in that, indeed we walk on two legs, and for me, one is abstract, the other Surreal – it is point and counterpoint.'

The Horned Woman, 1978

Acrylic on canvas

Private collection



Continues on next page.

Cleopatra, 1979

Acrylic on canvas

Collection of Goshka Macuga

Cleopatra was made after Agar had visited the 'Treasures of Tutankhamun' exhibition at the British Museum. The large eyed reclining figures – rendered in soft purply blues - who occupy the centre of the composition might well reference Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, and her lover the Roman General, Mark Antony. The colour palette is one of land and sea, with fragments of a world map visible along the top edge of the painting, while the figures' fingers morph into and offer red heart forms toward. one another. This is one of the first paintings Agar made following the death of Joseph Bard in 1975, after which she could not paint for four years. It is telling that she chose to depict Cleopatra, who was central to one of history's most famous and decadent love affairs.

The Bird, 1969

Acrylic on canvas

The Estate of Eileen Agar

The Bird took almost two years to complete, evolving over time to reach its final form. The painting often features in photographs of Agar at home in the 1980s, suggesting it was a particularly cherished work. The imagery derives from a tiny model of a Mexican dove-like bird which is now housed in the Tate Archive. Birds recur throughout Agar's work from the 1930s up until the 1990s as an enduring symbol of hope. In a television appearance in 1948, she remarked 'Personally I am very fond of feathers. Maybe I was a bird. But then the way I feel my feathers should be arranged has an absolute pattern.' Oval forms act as portholes which divide the surface of the painting, Agar remarked 'I thought it would be more interesting to put the eggs in the bird's wings.' Made a few years after her discovery of acrylic paint, the colours are tropical and translucent, the palette influenced by her post-war trips to the Canary Islands.

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The Sorcerer's Apprentice, 1977

Photocollage and acrylic pen

Collection of Goshka Macuga



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The Black Flower, 1981

Ink on paper

Pallant House Gallery



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Homage to Braque, 1963

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Georges Braque was a major 20th-century French painter, collagist, printmaker and sculptor. His most important contributions to the history of art were his alliance with Fauvism from 1905, and the role he played in the development of Cubism alongside Pablo Picasso from 1908-14. Braque's quiet nature was partially eclipsed by Picasso's fame and notoriety but it was Braque who Agar chose to pay tribute to, following his death in 1963. In this work she recalls several Cubist techniques, using a flattened perspective and intertwining and rigid planes to give the illusion of volume and space. Her depiction of Braque is sombre in tone, embellished with leaf and tree forms that are reminiscent of one of Braque's most celebrated Cubist work houses at L'Estaque, 1908.

Maenad, 1965

Oil on canvas

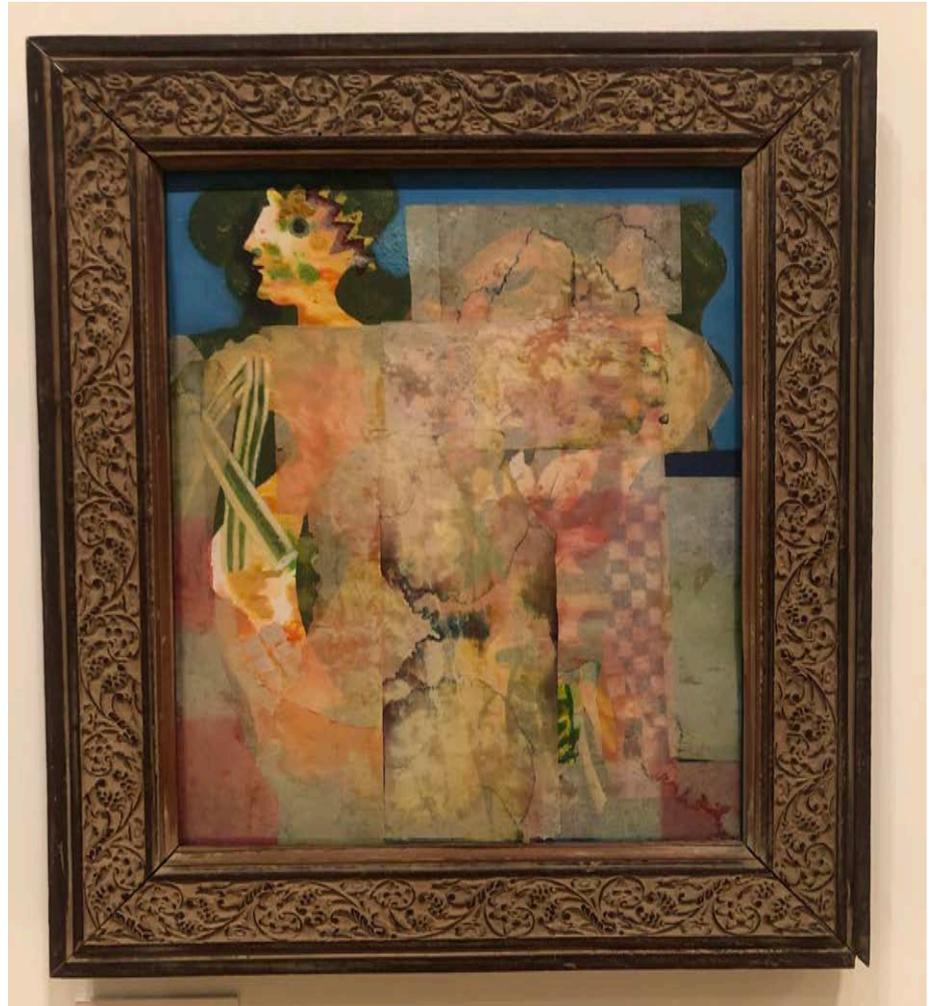
The Haines Collection

Agar had an enduring interest in classical mythology and the way that it depicted women. In Greek mythology, Maenads were the female followers of Dionysus, their name translates as 'raving ones'. Often the Maenads were portrayed in a state of ecstatic frenzy reached through dance and intoxication. They dressed in fox skins and carried a thyrsus, a long stick wrapped in ivy or vine leaves. On their heads they wore a bull helmet in honour of their god, as well as carrying or being adorned with snakes. Agar's Maenad retains many of these visual clues; the rusty fox-coloured background, the sprays of foliage within the silhouette of the helmet, and the peeping eye of a snake, however, her 'raving woman' is serene and self-assured, Agar has granted her back her own agency.

Figure in a Garden, 1969

Oil, gouache and collage on paper

Private collection



Continues on next page.

The Partners, 1965

Oil on canvas

Derby Museum and Art Gallery



Continues on next page.

Figures in a Forest, 1954

Gouache, ink, pastel, biro and wax crayon on paper

Pallant House Gallery



Continues on next page.

Tree Torso 4, c.1950

Lacquer and acrylic on card

Redfern Gallery, London



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The Sea (the coast at Eastbourne) 1950

Oil and enamel on board

Redfern Gallery, London

Made during a particularly experimental period in Agar's post-war career, *The Sea (the coast at Eastbourne)* uses enamel paint – which Agar had been investigating through pouring and dripping onto canvas – with a considered and sensitive approach. In this open and unconstrained depiction of nature, the enamel which Agar had found to be so liberating allows her to produce a very free composition but without some of the frenzy of other works of this time. The sea is one of Agar's most enduring influences. So many of her works incorporate marine life and the mythologies and motifs of the ocean. It could be argued that Agar's long and frequent childhood journeys – by sea – between Argentina and England had a formative impact on her, generating a visual language that affected her whole approach to image-making for years to come.

Head and Torso, 1952

Frottage and crayon on paper

Private collection

Tenerife Frottage, 1952

Frottage and crayon on paper

Private collection



Frottage, Tenerife,

Continues on next page.

1953

Frottage and crayon on paper

Redfern Gallery, London

For Agar, Tenerife: 'that mountainous dew-drop in the ocean' was transformative, reconnecting her to nature after the war and giving her a renewed belief in artistic expression. In Tenerife, Agar employed the Surrealist technique of frottage, using it to skilfully render the contrast between the sub-tropical vegetation of the island and its more arid, volcanic deserts. Indeed frottage is literally a means of capturing the traces of a place and in her frottages from the island, Agar depicts the tranquil energy that she discovered there through an accumulation of textures and found forms.

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Cornucopia, 1949

Oil on board

Mark and Katharine Anderson

In her post-war paintings Agar's palette was often softer and more pastel-hued than some of her previous works. *Cornucopia* is no exception. Here she also employs many of the effects of layering and stencilling that she had learned through her experiments in collage, but using purely painted forms. In classical antiquity, the cornucopia, also called the horn of plenty, was a symbol of abundance and nourishment, commonly a large horn-shaped container overflowing with produce, flowers, or nuts. Though more abstract than other works from this period, this work is a conscious move towards celebration and cheer, as though Agar is trying to will herself toward happiness.

Adam's Apple, 1949

Watercolour on paper

Wakefield Permanent Art Collection

(The Hepworth Wakefield)

Agar recognised the writer Lewis Carroll as 'a prophet of Surrealism' and his fictional character Alice was very important to her. In this richly textured watercolour, Agar's caterpillar – emerging from the apple – recalls John Tenniel's well-known illustrations of the caterpillar from Alice in Wonderland. Within the book the caterpillar plays an important role in the development of Alice's identity, his first, crucial words to her being: 'who are you?' He thereby induces Alice to begin a process of reclaiming her own identity. In the context of Agar's post-war works, this painting could be understood as an attempt by Agar to rediscover her artistic self, while the title of the work offers another reading, connecting it to questions of gender and sexuality.

Continues on next page.

Caliban, 1945

Oil and collage on canvas

Reiff Collection, David Chivers



Continues on next page.

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Dance of Peace, 1945

Gouache on paper

Collection of Kathryn Ludlow

Possibly the first painting Agar made after the end of the war, *Dance of Peace* embodies a budding and tentative optimism. Painted in pastel washes with bucolic forms, the arrangement of dancing figures seems to draw directly from Agar's processes of collage, layering and overlapping. Here semi-translucent animals, birds, leaves, flowers and faces emerge between and behind the main figures, all set against a backdrop of rolling hills and a seaside horizon. In direct contrast to the violence of war and the rapid social changes it had wrought, *Dance of Peace* recalls a pastoral idyll – perhaps a May Day or harvest celebration - looking fondly back to humankind's more rural past.

(Yellow free-standing wall in the centre of Gallery 8)

Apocalyptic Head, 1963

Oil and acrylic on board

Private collection Agar made this haunting work following the assassination of President John F Kennedy in November 1963, and it was first shown in her Commonwealth Institute exhibition in London in 1971. While the work directly references a harrowing political event, the head is timeless and draws upon depictions of the gods of classical mythology. Amongst the vivid blue background are the abstract motifs and symbols which recur throughout Agar's paintings, including the nautilus shell. It is perhaps the most controlled example of her use of spontaneous painting. The fluid lines which comprise the head and shoulders have been created by pouring paint over blocks of white and purple which divide the face.

(Yellow free-standing wall in the centre of Gallery 8)

Collective Unconscious, 1977–8

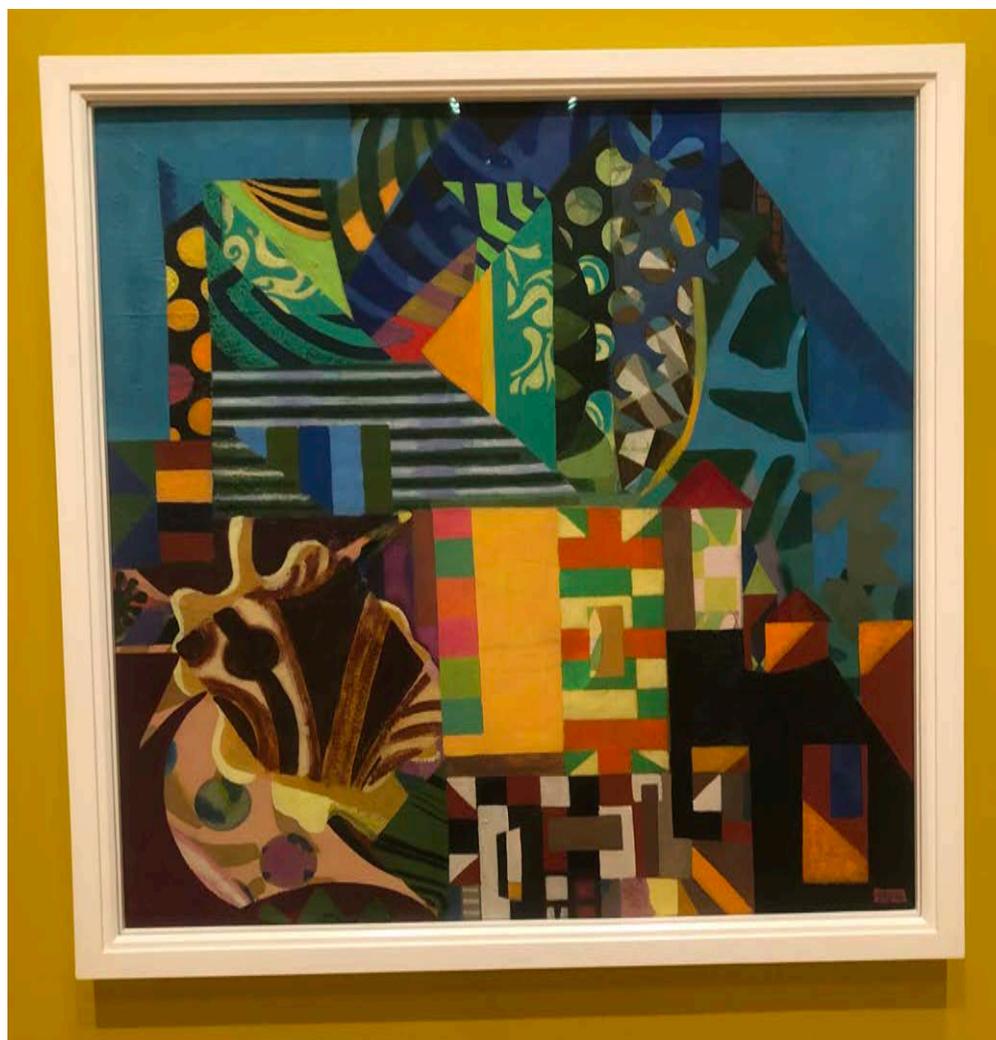
Acrylic on canvas

Royal Academy of Arts, London

The lyricism and vibrant colouring of *Collective Unconscious* is highly representative of Agar's late work. The composition combines Surrealist elements – shell like forms and hybridised foliage – with abstracted cutouts on a densely painted surface. Although the title of the painting refers to the unconscious, in this work Agar does not employ any of the automatic techniques intrinsic to Surrealist methods that she has used elsewhere. Rather, the work is perhaps a survey of all of the forms and ideas that have influenced Agar throughout her career, the forms that collectively fill her unconscious – molluscs, shells, leaves, seaanemones, seaweeds and fossils – 'their muted colour and embedded beauty. They reach us as signals in time,

Continues on next page.

isolated objects which reach to some moment far back
beyond the mists of human memory.



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Podcasts, Events and Exhibition Catalogue

'Hear, Now: Angel of Anarchy

Podcast Online

This episode celebrates Agar with contributions from Whitechapel Gallery Curator Laura Smith and Assistant Curator Grace Storey who share reflections on her legacy, alongside special guests including artist Lucy Stein, poet Daisy Lafarge and designer Beca Lipscombe.

Ways of Knowing: Water / Fluidity

Event Series Online

Eileen Agar was fascinated by water worlds – marine life, shells, the coastal and the amphibious. This series of events invites artists and thinkers to investigate contemporary fluidities and new imaginations of water, at a moment when our human relationship to it is arguably at its most strained.

Exhibition catalogue

Eileen Agar: Angel of Anarchy

Special exhibition price £24.99 (RRP £29.99)

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