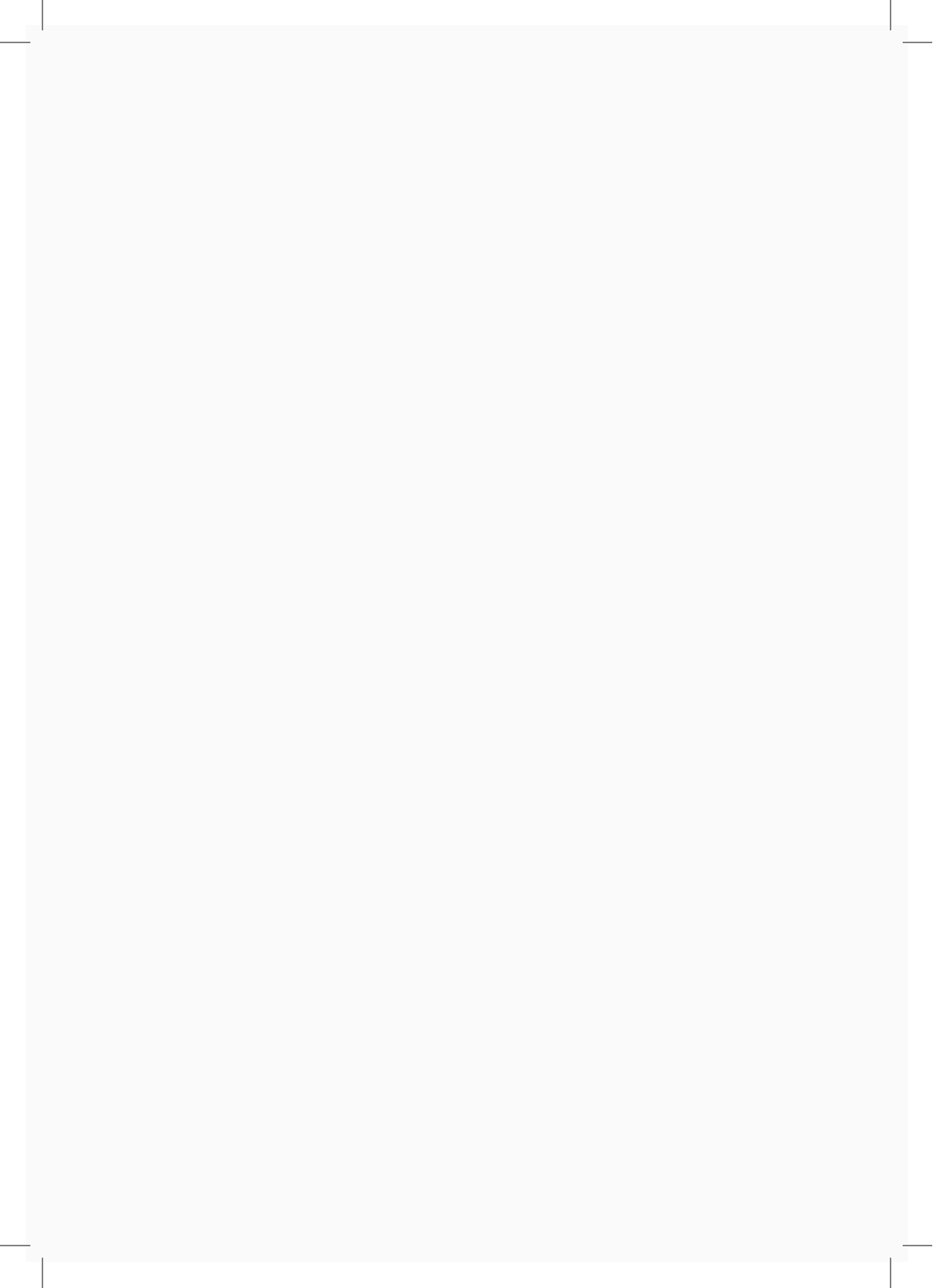


MAGIC MIRROR

CLAUDE CAHUN | SARAH PUCILL



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INTRODUCTION

Across Two Worlds

By Liena Vayzman

Androgyne, rag doll, Buddha, Devil, Medusa, magician of the self – Surrealist artist, writer and activist Claude Cahun played all these roles in her enigmatic photographs. What might a moving image film by Claude Cahun look like? This innovative exhibition brings together London filmmaker Sarah Pucill's 2013 film *Magic Mirror* with the original photographs from the 1920s, '30s, and '40s by Claude Cahun that inspired the film. *Magic Mirror* fulfills Cahun's photographs' implied filmic potential, almost a century later.

The exhibit juxtaposes Claude Cahun's photographs and Sarah Pucill's film as parallel cultural missives on the primacy of self-invention and the power of imagination, with Cahun playing muse to Sarah Pucill's 21st century cinematic interpretation. On the walls of the Nunnery Gallery, a former convent in London with distinctive archways, Cahun's self-portrait photographs – some depicting her in the stone archways at her house in Jersey, Channel Islands – echo architecturally and cinematically across time and space.

Claude Cahun, c. 1939. Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections



The shift from photography to film enacts an alchemical transformation from the two dimensions of the flat photographic surface to the four dimensions of film, adding the aspects of moving image and time. Cahun's photographs enact a performative *mise en scène*. The photographs that art historians earlier deemed self portraits sometimes were made in collaboration with Cahun's life partner Marcel Moore, who likely was behind the camera at times, together enacting what I've called an 'erotics of collaboration'¹ whereby reciprocity during the photographic process intertwines with queer sexuality. A number of Cahun's photographs portray her as a performer in avant-garde theatre. Bringing the photographs and photomontages to life in an unprecedented manner with 16mm black and white celluloid film technology, innovative production, and meticulous sound design, Pucill marshals theatrical *mise en scène*, staging, voice over of translations of Cahun's text *Aveux non avenues* (*Disavowals*, 1930)², and stop motion animation of portions of Cahun and Moore's photomontages. Pucill casts London performance artist Andro Andrex in the guise of Cahun, not for a physical similarity, but for the parallel sensibility of gender non-conformity, performativity, and pioneering queer visual identity. Two other main actors, Rowina Lennon and Kate Hart, also appear as Cahun, complicating any notion of a singular stable subject position.

Pucill uses selections of Cahun's writings in English translation as the voice over, with the chapter titles of *Aveux non avenues* forming the structure for the sections of the film. Each film section begins with an animation of one of the corresponding photomontages made by Marcel Moore "after designs by the author" reproduced as heliogravures in the 1930 edition. Thus, *Magic Mirror* engages with both the text and the images of *Aveux non avenues*, staging imagined filmed scenarios in response to the text and re-making, re-photographing, and animating the photomontages and Cahun's other unpublished photographs. The resulting film forms a hybrid, fluid interchange between artists and worlds.

The placement of stills from Pucill's film among the installation of Cahun's photographs at the Nunnery Gallery further elides boundaries between artists and historical timeframes. As Helena Reckitt and Pucill herself have noted, the appropriation and interpretation of Cahun's work in *Magic Mirror* raises questions about "the practice of re-staging the work of an artist who has no say in the matter."³ However, the artistic strategies of appropriating, sampling, remixing, and quoting historical precedents are characteristic of our postmodern era, evident across contemporary art, photography (e.g. Cindy Sherman, Yasumasu Morimura), music, fashion, film, and popular culture. Indeed, Claude Cahun herself drew upon an encyclopaedic knowledge of mythology, literature, classics, philosophy, and pop culture stereotypes in writing the multi-voiced *Aveux non avenue* (*Disavowals*) and in staging herself for the camera. The remaking and quotation of images – akin to the concept of "intertextuality" in literary criticism – can function as a particularly queer strategy, both of trenchant cultural critique (as for Cahun) and homage (in Pucill's case). Cahun's face in its many disguises proliferates, for example, in Plate IX: I.O.U. of *Aveux non avenue*. Around the conglomeration, Cahun writes: "Under this mask another mask. I shall never finish taking off all these faces." Overlapping, fusion, fragmentation and replication of the body and face are key pictorial strategies in nearly all the photomontages, announcing a self that is always multiple and in transformation. Likewise, *Magic Mirror* enacts a 21st century transformation in conversation with the work of Claude Cahun, entangling the two artists and eras together like the hair of the two women weaving together in the film: "The moment when our two heads, ah, our hair becoming inextricably entwined, bent over a photograph. A portrait of one or the other. Our two narcissisms drowning in it. It was the impossible realised in a magic mirror."⁴

Significant differences exist between London in 2015 and the years of Cahun's life, which spanned the avant garde between WWI and WWII in Paris, a time of progressive cultural vibrancy tinged with misogyny,

homophobia, and increasing conservatism: French women did not have the right to vote; and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people at times gained artistic terrain (particularly among the economically privileged, such as Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas), but not yet political gains such as marriage rights and non-discrimination protections as we see today in the West. Cahun, as a queer Jewish artist, lived through the rise of fascism, catastrophic anti-Semitism, World War II, and the German Occupation of the Channel Islands, which Cahun and Moore actively resisted. The gravity of Cahun's historical moment is redeemed by the life of the imagination, which Pucill ignites as a sort of everlasting flame burning across the generations.

We are witnessing Claude Cahun's cinematic afterlives.⁵ Two prior films have explored Cahun's art and biography in the past decade: Lizzie Thynne's *Playing A Part* and Barbara Hammer's *Lover/Other*.⁶ Both blend staged scenes and documentary interviews with art historians and associates. In contrast to these hybrid documentary films, Sarah Pucill's *Magic Mirror* functions as trans-chronological cinematic collaboration between two artists – kindred spirits, one living and one dead. *Magic Mirror* samples, remixes, and reimagines Cahun's written words and visual images in a thrilling, uncanny way. The thrill comes from seeing and hearing what Cahun might have created with film and sound, or in collaboration with a filmmaker. Pucill has been engaging with the work of Cahun for over 15 years as exemplified in her short film *Cast* (2000). Pucill's staging of two women kissing through a mirror is an artistic approach that re-embodies Cahun's photographs, animating them in the sense of breathing in life, but also innovates by visually enacting the written texts. Moving between the languages of written word, spoken word, moving image, and still photograph, *Magic Mirror* transcends boundaries of media and authorship. Comparing Cahun's still photographs with Pucill's imagined scenarios tangibly visualises processes and backstories, where Pucill dialogues with Cahun. By linking a 21st

century artist with her predecessor/muse, this exhibition participates in continued mapping of a queer genealogy and intergenerational dialogue.

The current mining of Cahun's oeuvre goes to the heart of today's theoretical concerns in the fields of gender and sexuality studies, contemporary art, photography, film, video and music. The wilfully anti-mainstream aesthetics of a countercultural identity, masquerades, performativity, attack on restrictive gender norms, and a politics of resistance that are hallmarks of Claude Cahun resonate in artists as diverse as performer Leigh Bowery; video artists Patty Chang and Narcissister; punk rock (recall Cahun's shaved head in 1920); photographer Catherine Opie who documented queer culture in the 1990s; transgender artist duo Zachary Drucker and Rhys Ernst who photograph their transformation and relationship; and post-pop queercore band The Third Sex (taking their name from a concept by Havelock Ellis, the sexologist whose work Cahun translated into French).⁷ Like Sarah Pucill, all of these artists share Claude Cahun's commitment to imaging other worlds where restrictive societal rules are broken and reshaped, bodies are not stable, identity is malleable, and historical trajectories collide and fuse.

END NOTES

¹ Liena Vayzman, *The Self-Portraits of Claude Cahun: Transgression, Self-Representation, and Avant-Garde Photography*, PhD dissertation, Yale University, USA, 2002.

² Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avenus*, Paris: Carrefour, 1930. Published in English: Claude Cahun, *Disavowals*, translated by Susan de Muth, London: Tate Publishing, 2007.

³ Helena Reckitt, *Between Mirrors*, brochure accompanying DVD, *Magic Mirror*, London: LUX, 2013

⁴ Claude Cahun, *Disavowals*, Chapter 6, and as voice-over in *Magic Mirror*.

⁵ I developed the concept in the talk *Claude Cahun's Cinematic Afterlife*, prepared for the Queer Experimental Film and Video Panel, College Art Association conference, New York, 2015.

⁶ *Playing A Part: The Story of Claude Cahun* (Dir. Lizzie Thynne, UK, 2005); *Lover/Other* (Dir. Barbara Hammer, USA, 2006).

⁷ Havelock Ellis, *L'hygiène sociale: La femme dans la société, Volume I of Études de psychologie sociale*. Trans. Lucie Schwob [Claude Cahun], Mercure de France, 1929.



IN CAHUN'S MAGIC MIRROR: A CONVERSATION

By Sarah Pucill

There is a difficulty to Cahun's work that draws me into her world. Following her argument in *Les Paris Sont Ouverts (Place your bets)*,¹ where she warns of the dangers of artistic or poetic language that becomes propaganda, her message is always latent, not manifest. She shaves her head and shows off her 'unfeminine' Jewish-looking nose and painted white vampiric skin by giving us an acute side profile. Offering, in her own words, 'the courage to be repulsive', Cahun strikes a pose of independence and self-reinvention.

Cahun never smiles in her photographs, her gaze at the viewer is serious, concentrated. She writes in *Aveux non avenues* that 'Smiling is the province of women'. In front of a mirror in a Surrealist chessboard coat, Cahun's ungendered gaze looks instead into the other mirror, the camera, head turned to us, that will immortalise the moment. In a photograph of the same space, Cahun is replaced with her life-long partner Marcel Moore. But here Moore looks back through the mirror and into the camera, at Cahun to whom she smiles. In another photograph Moore looks into the mirror, left and right are inverted as inverted desire. This labyrinthine play of a gaze that embraces the viewer to explore the complexity of female self imaging in relation to a queer sexuality has been a point of stimulus for my own work. In my film *Cast* (2000) these two 'mirror' images became a mini scene, where a lesbian kiss initiates a passing through the mirror. This journey to a different place where bare feet tread on soft sand occurs in a similar way in *Magic Mirror* (2013), but here the text narrating the 'story' of a journey through the mirror is Cahun's writing.

Having lived with Cahun's images since being introduced to her work in 1990, to discover the English translation of her text *Aveux non avenues* in 2007 was strange. Having imagined her thoughts whilst being confronted with her otherwise silent images for so long, to suddenly hear her speak was for me an experience of the uncanny, something of Cahun had come to life. This concern with the uncanny that is a key root of Surrealism, and is core to much of Cahun's work, is also part of how I encounter her as a dead artist that has left inanimate objects of photographs and print behind.² Her images started to speak in a way that opened up a new world. I wanted to make a film 'to do' with her but as she was resistant to being defined, the only way was to make a film 'with', as if alongside her as a way of exchange, to share a dialogue.

Aveux non avenues is described by Pierre Mac-Orlan, who writes the preface in the original publication, as "a series of cinematic glimpses".³ Kaleidoscopic in structure, reminiscent of a fairground, and introduced by Cahun as 'An Invisible Adventure', Agnes Lhermitte describes the book's scrutiny of self as a "a scalpel's investigation into the dark zones of the psyche, the painful gaping of a cracked being".⁴ The chapters of 'cut up' text mixes letter-writing, poem, dream, monologue, dialogue, and essay, and are headed with a collage 'photo-gravure' that Cahun and Moore collaborated on.⁵ It is in the spirit of this mosaic juxtaposition that I hope to contribute as a filmmaker, a further collaged layer. The animation of my re-staged photographs and photo collages is stitched to Cahun's writing that is transformed into a soundscape. The word-image dialogue in the book becomes a layered conversation between word, image, sound and movement.

The reason I wanted to make the film was to bring together Cahun's examination of the genre of self-portraiture (implicit in her ironic 'self' portraits) with her examination of the genre of autobiography in *Aveux non avenues*, both of which critique the representation of self



Sarah Pucill, *Magic Mirror*, 2013, film still.

as singular, coherent and known. Cahun's writing in *Aveux non avenues* shifts grammatically between first, second and third person. In *Magic Mirror* I combine this plurality of selves in her writing with the plurality of self she creates in her images. These multiple projections of self onto 'others' extends also to the world of the inanimate, where mannequin eyes travel between mirror, living performer and spectator. I wanted to highlight in the film a productive schism I see in Cahun's oeuvre which engages both a philosophical and psychoanalytic understanding of self, with a politicisation of the socially divided body across lines of gender, sexuality, class, race and religion. Confounding the binary idea that an artist might need to choose between politics or art, Cahun is unwavering in her absolutist commitment to both; she risks her life for her political ideals but equally will not sacrifice art for political propaganda. The writing selected from *Aveux non avenues* attempts to highlight the power of Cahun's insights, which relate across and between my own history of filmmaking as well as to Cahun's photographs so that a mixing of authorship became inevitable.

I am interested in the question of what a filmmaker can do with the archive of a dead artist especially with regards to photographs and writing. Exploring Cahun's photographs by re-staging and extending a still moment to the duration of time, and adding her words was a method that combined research into Cahun's work, whilst turning interpretation into a creative act that re-invents through re-enactment. The opportunity to animate the written word through voice, and to animate the photograph through a re-staging, can occur only because of and since the invention of cinema. I like the idea that it is possible to 'play' a photograph by transforming it into a film, by performing it as a written script or as music score can be played. The sound of the fairground organ that accompanies the animation of selected sections of the photographs, is to celebrate the circular structure of *Aveux non avenues* where photographic duplication is itching to be animated.



Claude Cahun, c.1939. Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections



Sarah Pucill, *Phantom Rhapsody II*, 2010.
Photographic Print from Negative

Cahun was interested in avant-garde and silent cinema⁶ and I believe she would have made films had she had the means. Where Cahun's period marks the beginning of cinema, we are now witnessing the end of celluloid cinema in terms of the industry. The film labs were closing as I was making the film that was all shot on 16mm black and white.

I love the way Cahun uses curtains in her photographs to evoke both a theatre stage with a public audience as well as a private space of the home. Her use of curtain makes the slippage between performing for a photograph and performing for a live audience, both being sites of Cahun's practice.⁷ She describes the curtain that rises then stays down on the actor, and an audience that doubles as a past lover and her prey, has disappeared.⁸ These different spaces that curtains mark, that intersect Art and life, life and death, private and public, either protect or expose a body to light, to the world. The contrasting evocations of 'stage' (and therefore curtain), that move from a private introspective journey to a public arena, represent the schizophrenic needs of an artist: to need and not need an audience. I am interested in the degree to which an artist may be speaking to an audience of another time and the relevance of 'history' for the now.

In response to the poor reception Cahun received for the publication of her book *Aveux non avenus*, Cahun writes:

"In vain in *Disavowals* I tried through black humour, provocation, defiance to shake my contemporaries out of their blissful conformism, their complacency. Ostracism was more or less the general response. Aside from silence, the book was met with the basest insults. This is how 'literary criticism'... sought to welcome the 'prose-poems' of this unwanted Cassandra".⁹

Looking at, listening and responding to earlier women artists has a long

history in my filmmaking. A key inspiration for *Magic Mirror* was *Johnny Panic*, (2000), made by the experimental filmmaker, Sandra Lahire who was also my late partner (lover) when she died in 2001. I took Lahire's idea to 'collaborate with a dead artist', whose trilogy of films, *Lady Lazarus* (1991), *Night Dances* (1995) and *Johnny Panic* (2000) on the poet Sylvia Plath explore a collaboration between Plath's writing and voice with Lahire's cinematic choreography and soundscape. In a similar way *Magic Mirror* explores word and image, largely in relation to the body that speaks and is seen.

END NOTES

¹ Claude Cahun, *Les Paris Sont Ouverts (Place your bets)*. Paris: José Corti, May 1934

² Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avendus*, Paris: Carrefour, 1930. Published in English: Claude Cahun, *Disavowals*, translated by Susan de Muth, London: Tate Publishing, 2007.

³ Pierre Mac-Orlan, 'Preface', Claude Cahun, *Aveux Non Avenus*, Paris: Carrefour, 1930.

⁴ Agnès Lhermitte, 'Postscript: some brief observations,' Claude Cahun, *Disavowals*, London: Tate Publishing, 2007.

⁵ *Aveux non avendus* - writing by Claude Cahun with collaborative photo-gravures between Cahun and Marcel Moore, "after designs by the author".

⁶ Conversation with François Leperlier, author of *Claude Cahun: L'Exotisme interieur*, Fayard, 2006.

⁷ Cahun performed in avant-garde theatre group *Le Plateau* directed by Pierre Albert-Birot, Paris 1929-30. Two 'self' portraits are taken directly from costumes she wore as 'Elle', Bluebeards wife in *Barbe Blue* and 'Monsieur' in *Banlieu*. Information from *Don't Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, Ed. Louise Downie, Tate Publishing, Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006.

⁸ Claude Cahun, script for the film, *Magic Mirror*, Sarah Pucill, 2013, translation by Rachel Gomme.

⁹ Claude Cahun, 'Lettre à Paul Levy,' 3 July 1950, *Confidences au miroir* unpublished 1945-6, in François Leperlier, *Ecrits*.



Sarah Pucill, *Stages of Mourning IX*, 2000. Performed with Sandra Lahire.

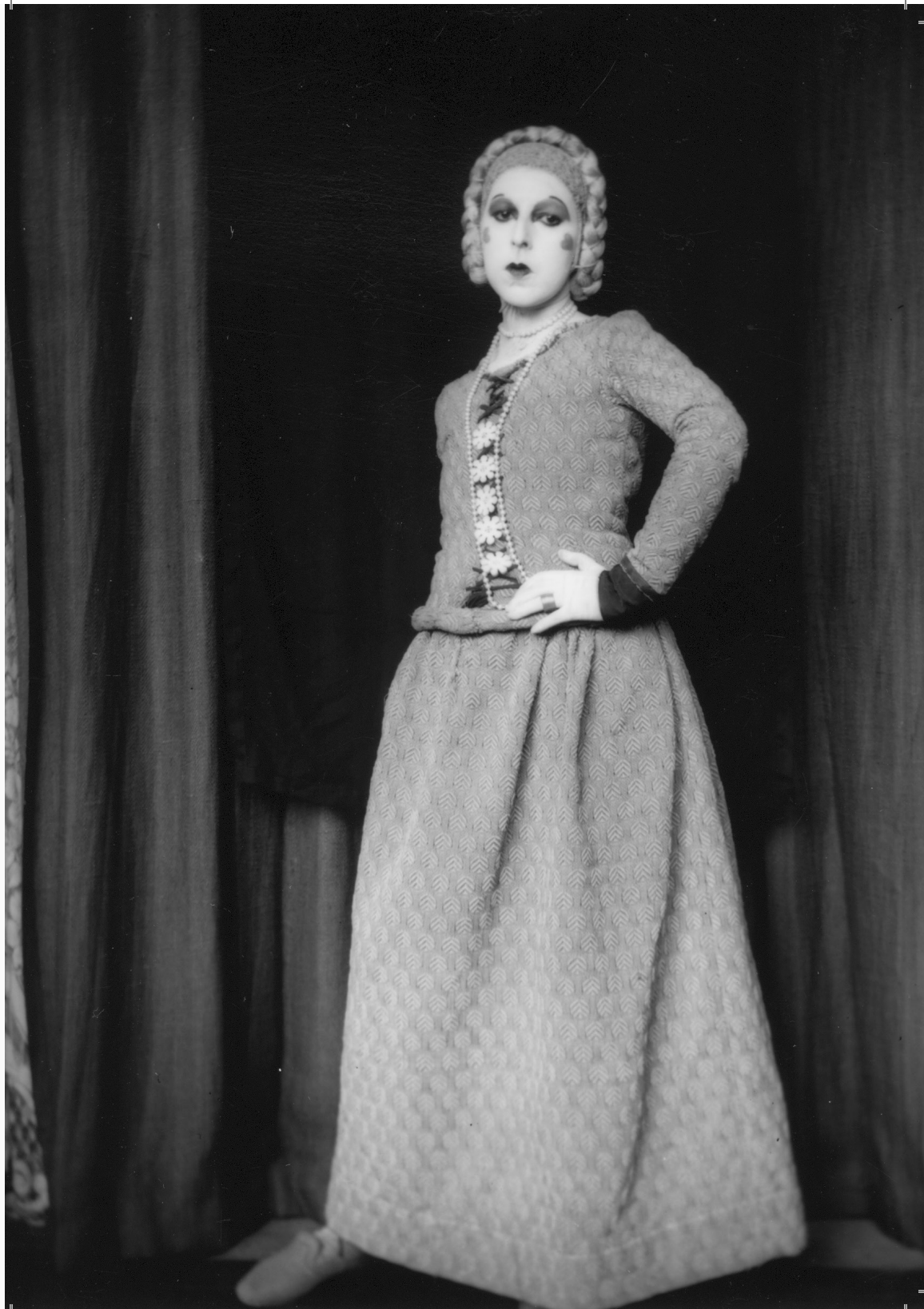
BIOGRAPHY

The Life of Claude Cahun By Louise Downie

Claude Cahun was born as Lucy Schwob in 1894 in Nantes, Northern France. She came from a wealthy, Jewish family of intellectuals and authors. In 1918 she adopted the surname of her great uncle Léon Cahun - an Orientalist and Novelist. Her forename, Claude, in French can be either male or female, or in Claude's case - both. Cahun's father was the director of the regional newspaper *Le Phare de la Loire*.

In 1909, the 15 year old Lucy met 17 year old Suzanne Malherbe, who became her lifelong companion and lover. Malherbe worked as a graphic artist under the pseudonym Marcel Moore. Their liaison became a familial relationship when in 1917, Cahun's divorced father, Maurice Schwob, married Moore's widowed mother, Marie Malherbe. This entwining of the two daughters facilitated their artistic collaborations and provided a cover for their intimate relationship.

Claude Cahun as Elle in *Barbe Bleue*, 1929. Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections



Cahun and Moore lived in Paris in the 1920s and early 1930s. From 1925 to 1927 Cahun performed in several experimental theatre productions presented by the *Théâtre Esotérique*. In 1929 Cahun joined the obscure theatre group *Le Plateau*, directed by Pierre Albert-Birot. Cahun performed as Elle the wife of Blue Beard in *Barbe bleue*, as Le Diable (Satan) in an adaptation of a 12th century mystery play about Adam and Eve called *Les Mysteres d'Adam*. Often these productions were such a departure from standard theatre that there were more people in the cast than in the audience. These productions introduced Cahun and Moore to the leading members of the Surrealist circle. Many of Cahun's photographs from 1920s and early 30s document these activities.

Cahun wrote near the end of her life, "I am what I have always been (my earliest childhood memories attest to it): a Surrealist. Essentially. As much as one can be without killing one's self or falling into the clutches of the psychiatrists."¹ André Breton, leader of the Surrealist group, was said to have disliked her intensely, put off by her unconventional appearance and homosexuality, although he respected her work and called her "one of the most curious spirits of our time".²

During her lifetime, Cahun was better known as a writer than a photographer – publishing articles in newspapers and magazines and writing two books – *Vues et Visions* (1919) and *Aveux non avendus* (1930). She only published one photograph during her lifetime.

Classical and biblical figures were a constant theme in Cahun's work. In the 1920s she wrote *Heroïnes*, a manuscript of 15 monologues based on famous women from the Bible, Greek myth, Western children's literature and popular culture. These characters present counter-examples of stereotypical myths of feminine behaviour, disrupting culturally established norms. Cahun situates these women in the 20th century, demonstrating the endurance of old myths concerning femininity.



Claude Cahun, May 1945 (taken after the Liberation).
Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections



Claude Cahun, c1928. Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections

In 1929 Cahun translated into English Havelock Ellis' theories on a third-sex – uniting both male and female traits, but existing as neither. To Ellis it was a pathology, but to Cahun it was a way of representing herself outside the normal constraints of gender. Cahun wrote: "Masculine? Feminine? But it depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that always suits me."³ Masks were a constant and repeated device in Cahun's work. Cahun shows herself in multiple selves, demonstrating that identity is not a fixed, autonomous condition. For Cahun, the self really is a masquerade.

Cahun was aware of many symbolist writings, which rewrote the myth of Narcissus. In Andre Gide's *Treatise of Narcissus* (1892),⁴ Narcissus dreams that he regresses to the pre-gendered origins of humanity, when Narcissus is still unsexed – an androgyne.

From the 1930s onwards Claude photographed herself not only in interior spaces, but in the real world, in gardens, beaches and architectural settings. She still used extravagant costumes and masks, but much less often. She started to manipulate the real world as a tool for her self portraiture.

In 1937, Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore moved from France to the Channel Island of Jersey, a place they knew well from family holidays. They moved to a house they symbolically called *La ferme sans nom*.

In 1940 German forces invaded the Island, and began a five year occupation. In characteristic fashion, the sisters did not simply put up with the situation and get on with their lives as best they could, but rather mounted a dangerous two-person resistance campaign against the Nazi occupiers. They secretly distributed notes in German signed 'der Soldat ohne Namen' ('the soldier with no name') which contained demoralising war news or poems. They distributed these texts by placing



Claude Cahun, c. 1947. (St Brelades Graveyard in the background).
Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections

them in soldier's pockets, in staff cars parked outside the church next to their house, or placing them inside cigarette packets which were left lying around ready for a hopeful smoker to pick up. They carried out these activities for years until they were eventually arrested and put on trial in 1944.

Cahun and Moore seem to have relished this opportunity to rebel – they would dress up in what they deemed to be 'normal' clothes so that they would blend in more and become indistinguishable from others. In 1930s Paris they had signed anti-Fascist statements and joined anti-Fascist groups, but now they were able to take physical action against the political authority. It took a while for their trial to take place because the German authorities simply could not believe that these rather sickly old ladies (which is how they presented themselves) could have carried out these activities. They were eventually found guilty and sentenced to death for their resistance activities and six months imprisonment for having a radio. The Bailiff's appeal for clemency was allowed, although the sisters refused to sign letters of appeal and their death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. They were released when the Island was liberated in May 1945.

Claude's health suffered during the war and the few portraits she did after the Liberation were dominated by the theme of death with St Brelade's Churchyard becoming the backdrop of many of her images, where, incidentally, she was buried after her death in 1954. Moore continued to live in Jersey until her suicide in 1972.

The 'self' is the key strategy of Cahun's work. She explored 'self' in terms of self-invention, parody, and the ironic reversal of dominant representations of gender, sexuality and race. She was an intriguing artist – complex, fascinating, attractive, repellent, arrogant, highly sexual, asexual, ultra-feminine or ultra-masculine, androgynous. Her work invites

but defies explanation. It is a masquerade, a performance, a challenge. If we were to come to any conclusion about Cahun at all it can only be that there is no Cahun, there are many Cahuns. It is not a dizzying, confusing or threatening creation, but an intimate, thoughtful, savoured and multifaceted creation. In essence, by not accepting the culturally established norms of male and female, Cahun was able to draw on the characteristics of both.

We should also recognise Moore's role in the creation – she was more than an assistant. Cahun called her 'L'Autre Moi' – the Other Me, emphasising the solidarity and in some ways the independence and interdependence of their partnership.

END NOTES

¹ Claude Cahun, Letter to Jean Schuster, 1953

² Dr Jennifer L Shaw, *Reading Claude Cahun's Disavowals*, Ashgate, 2013

³ Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avendus* (Paris: Editions du Carrefour), 1930

⁴ Andre Gide, *Le traité du Narcisse: Theorie du symbole* (*The Treatise of Narcissus: Theory of the Symbol*), 1891





Claude Cahun & Marcel Moore, Plate II, *Aveux non avenus* (1930), photomontage.
Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections.

SPOKEN TEXT

Magic Mirror

Claude Cahun's *Aveux non avenues*, published in 1930, resists any clear genre classification with a merging of essays, poems, dreams, dialogues and musings set into chapters that each has an illustrated photomontage and was made in collaboration with Marcel Moore. The title itself perplexes - 'Aveux' meaning confessions turns to obscurity with the addition of 'non avenues' meaning void. The title is often translated as Disavowals or Cancelled Confessions. As Cahun's photography was overlooked during her life-time, in contradiction, today it is her writing that often goes unnoticed.

Pucill's film *Magic Mirror* allows you to experience Cahun's written words into spoken form. Below is a script from *Magic Mirror* taking selected extracts from Claude Cahun's *Aveux non avenues* translated by Rachel Gomme. The script follows Pucill's play and collage of chapters.



Sarah Pucill, *Hand Mirror*, 2013. Photographic print from negative.

Spoken Text:

Dear strangers, be sure to keep your distance: you are all I have in the world.

Man will not get out of this on his own. Atrophied adult, child crying on his mothers belly, the poet still calling to his muse, the dreamer to his guardian angel, Saul to his seven beautiful demons

Open and someone will knock. Anyone who has been unhappy with their role on Earth God puts before a review panel. I'll provide the theatre, you choose your sets your plots, your character, your sex, your make up. But the false notes struck on stage will be forever reproduced.

It's not without an ulterior motive I have my hair shaved off, my teeth pulled, my breasts, everything that gets in the way or irritates my gaze, stomach, ovaries, the conscious cyst-like brain.

I won't leave it. I cant see how one can leave ones own self. This house, this obsession. I will not get out of here. I cannot imagine how one would get out of oneself, this house, this haunting. There is only one solution, to set fire to it.

Chapter I R C S (fear)

I want to scandalize the pure, little children, old people,
with my nakedness, the hoarse tone of my voice,

My thought would take revenge in mirrors, which it
sought out. Lovesick, sadistic, and yet torturing itself at
the same time, dragging this recalcitrant body in front
of its reflection, holding it there, then feigns surprise
and pretends not to recognise it. Criticises it, judges it
unworthy and finally puts it to sleep like a guard in order
to escape from this sordid prison.

The dark crowd, the anonymous, the silvering behind the
glass where the poet admires himself.

The blade of a window. Where shall I put the silver? On
this side or that. In front or behind the glass.

In front, I imprison myself. I blind myself. Why should I
passer-by want to hold a mirror up for you in which you
can recognise yourself, albeit a distorting mirror, signed
by my own hand? I'm not a mirror wardrobe merchant
nor a pedlar of cosmic psychics, repellent attractions for
the great fairground of human flesh.

Behind once again I close myself in. I shall know nothing of
the outside. At least I shall know my face and maybe that
will be enough to please me.

Chapter II MY-SELF (self-love)

The lens tracks the eyes, the mouth. The lines skim the
surface. The expression on the face is fierce, at times

tragic, at last calm, with the carefully constructed knowing calm of an acrobat. A professional smile and voila.

The lipstick and eye-shadow. A moment, full stop. New paragraph.

Lipstick which never goes beyond the edge of this mouth. Whose muscles never slacken. But is each of its ever varied movements not an ever renewed, ever repeated refusal? And will it not always be so?

What were you talking about? I was listening very closely. The ocean. Me too. The ocean is you, you who swallow me up.

A mouth, nostrils quivering. Between swooning eyelids, the mad fixity of dilated pupils. In the brutal light of an electric bulb, pale gold, mauve and, green, under the stars.

A look longed for. No only eyes, cold eyes multiplying because they cause me to suffer. Immense. I will never reach the other side of this desert ice which is all the more cruel as I burn and which refuses me even the comfort of my reflection.

The silvering of the mirror thickens. The being is individualised.

She triumphs. Sometimes over the most appalling embarrassments. A deftness corrects a shadow, an unwise gesture, pride becomes virtue. She consents to recognise herself.

Brighten the silvering on the mirror, wink, cheat myself,

start up my skeleton with a fluke muscle, correct my mistakes and copy out my actions, divide myself in order to conquer myself, multiply myself so I can make a mark, so I can impress myself.

Chapter III X Y Z (lying)

I would like to merit being observed by you with as much detachment, as the gods, as the dolls of the human soul.

For the rules of the social game which I would like to change are such that I never once win a hand against the rest of the world, against you, against us, against the best of myself.

Here I am, a jobless virgin, a queen on strike, voluntary unemployed, on the margin and as they say outlawed from humanity.

Masculine, feminine, it depends on the situation. Neuter is the only gender that fits every time.

I hold the fan of cards in my hand. Using them shows that I value them. I lose, I win, that's your business – it will be no good arguing with you about the king and the queen!... You know we are talking about mine.

Later I will reveal all, what it is the bearded lady makes such a mystery of. I will expose her famous trick. I'm waiting until I have the upper hand.

Chapter IV E D M (sex)

What contradictions does dream not bring to deceitful



reality? I want that thought. I see it, stop it, reproduce it in the sky, this muscle that I sculpted so cruelly, will it melt in my own heat? The marble statues firm and polished, smoother than the best scrubbed skin.

Our mirrors are almost perfect. We still suffer from their vertical position.

The beautiful child was able to draw the infinite from his reflection while we remain, always the same, unable to go further.

But what makes Narcissus despair is not being able to drink himself. It is not the solid unbreakable coldness that separates glass from image. Between him and himself there is something else that has to be shattered, always a quarter moon, never fullness, always partial light. He sees enough of his ideal to be disgusted by the rest of the world.

Chapter V C M S (sex)

Encounter on a young girls breast. On a custard pie. Who knows what separate intensions led our hands from so far away to touch. Similarities? Sympathy? miracle? No. coincidence.

The mother was so unappetising that the baby was offered an aperitif before being served the breast.

I am a woman, compassion gives me a taste for comforting, for making love. But since after all I am a man and quick to bite, beware it can be rough.



I shall soothe you volcano. I shall feed on your lava.

I've done away with your enemies serpent. So I will have to suck your venom like the milk of a substitute mother, of a pedigree dog. For if your udders become heavier, sterile and swollen with blood of war, with the sperm of hate. In peace, in love, I will not be able to find your pure form again.

One evening, I crossed the threshold, unnoticed by the demon who bludgeons dreams as they pass.

Until I can see clearly I want to hunt myself down, Fight. My breath still ragged with blanked out terror. We're handcuffed together.

Can one come to terms with such monsters?

Someone, anyone, it doesn't matter which of these madwomen it was squared up to me and threw me down and took my place, to no end. The game starts again.

Hit the void bang in the centre.

Chapter VI C M C (sex)

Sweet, beneath a candle shoved into an old bottle of Bass, exchange overlaying, fusion of desires. The unity of the image achieved through the close friendship between two bodies for the sake of which they send their souls to the Devil.

Soiled glacier sheets. Purity of the Earth defiled. Turbulent hours. Our hair became so entangled, so inter-twined



Sarah Pucill, *Magic Mirror*, 2013. Film still

that night that in the morning, to cut through we had to shave our heads.

I shall struggle to see again her hair floating, indistinguishable amid the backdrop. A mesh of stars. Subtle web of the dishevelled night.

The moment when our two heads, ah, our hair becoming inextricably entwined, bent over a photograph.

A portrait of one or the other. Our two narcissisms drowning in it. It was the impossible realised in a magic mirror.

Oh sweet little girl, lay the dried flower of your grace between the leaves of my book and my favourite acts.

Let me become accustomed to your scent whose insipidity still sickens me a little, the bitter intoxication, how I love it, that first suffocates me despite myself.

A troubled dawn. A horizon lost in the mist of the waves.
Fragile, sky of glass, blue green

Her eyes become cloudy paler, her breasts prowl.. Their
roses of love, their pistils stand up. Sun, impatient beams.

No sooner has the azure appeared up above than the
turquoise begins to fade. Flat and dappled, pocked, like
fields of sand or Emerald, grey dunes, a desert of pearly.
Already its morning, monotone.

You caught me in your lakes Ether. Where love is
concerned its up close that illusion corrupts the senses.

Life, death, ageless sisters. and yet you are the younger.
You could never exist without your false twin. You
are bound together. You cannot wipe her out without
annihilating yourself.

More easily than I would have thought possible and
without leaving a trace, I pass my fist through the window.

Drunk with new extraordinarily harmonious sensations, I
was crossing a beach, the colour of wing dust, no sooner
touched than tarnished. I couldn't find the shape of my
own steps anymore.

At these shores I linger, unsure of the language of flowers.

Mad with regrettable curiosity and guided by my
customary passion I bend over the reflections on the wet
beach. A well suddenly opened up and I saw myself at the
bottom. And I was gripped by the horror of the unknown,
that mysterious beauty so desired, which seemed to have



Sarah Pucill, *Quilt*, 2013, Photographic print from negative.

swooped down on my soul like a bird of prey, covering it entirely, to devour it.

What I see inside this abominable bleeding hole comes from time, from myself, from within.

Paper target, freed from its ring. The prison of the orbit.

In the sun the shadow is clear cut, singular and dense. We cant take a step without treading on it.

I have just heard my laugh which has barely changed. And I understood that in the face of the sea, of love, of all the elemental forces, we so willingly surrender, age no longer exists, nor sex nor even any person, nor perhaps any possibility of separating souls and bodies that seek to come together.

I shall stand upright, rigid with the desire to fall.

Bitternesses, the sea, the only lover, whose arms are always open.

The waves of sleep wouldn't have me and threw me back broken onto the reefs of life.

Chapter VII N O N (greed, fear, self-pride)

The iris on which I cannot put make-up.

But where has the hostess retreated to? There behind the spyhole of the eyelids, two black points of mistrust, mathematical points stand watch, perpetually on guard.

And right at the back of the slot used for breathing, a bitten tongue.

Hit the most visible, full in the blackness. And to make sure you don't miss in front of a magnifying mirror.

Blinding oneself to see better, making sparks fly by striking at shadows. Strike the deafening silence to make it a tractable friend, strike syntax and rhythm and verb hard to draw out the water of death.

The intensity, the shame, could be enough if it hasn't died, its barely alive, The despised right eye furious squirts its sympathetic ink.

And the left eye renouncing itself, its royal robes, its miracles, finally doesn't dare to look at itself.

Do you fear to show your teeth? To dare to laugh without holding back, to let your reaction drive you to weeping? To what end? Your calm too will betray you. Smiling is the province of women.

Another kind of courage. The courage to be repulsive. You have to have gone through that. In the end you have to go through it. Our cowardly impulses don't change anything about that.

Curiosity keeps me alert, confronted with the face of a man, skin pot holed. Rutted, course grained, but white. Skull flat, forehead covered with hemp. Nose, mouth swollen. The absent gaze of the eyes, pit, well, without colour, without impact. Perfect horizon where I move forward, where I plunge, as an ex ray passes above my

head. I strain to believe that the image is out of focus. I squeeze, dilate, pulpate, the astonished diaphragm of my eyes

Love', 'conscience', Selflessness. I, Jewish to the point of using my sins for my salvation, of putting my by-products to work, my eye hooked over the edge of my own waste-bin!

Why does God force me to change faces, to wreak havoc with my deplorable qualities?

It's almost done. All that is left is the tensed end of the finger, the round mouth, ready to howl, the bullet, the leap, the fear, the circle of darkness growing larger.

I've had enough of repairing, eking life out, this rottenness, this suffering. Let's go for the fastest done: to the photographer's studio, to the guillotine, to the brothel, in my arms...

The unsociable one.

At least when one is alone, alone at last, only one enemy remains to be conquered.

A silence stands between us, a stubbornness. It must be my father. Yet he's straining to understand, and I'm straining to persuade us, him, my own heart and this man.. Yet the minute I feel my destiny yield and crack, in short the click of desire, I turn and flee, shouting and spitting out my soul, denying and renouncing my conquest, hurling abuse at my star.



Sarah Pucill, *White Satin*, 2013. Photographic print from negative.

Chapter VIII I O U (self-pride)

Feminism is already there in the fairy-tales, Our magicians will show these little boys that they can do without those dry wet-nurses.

If you dared to look closer, her face would be simply a mask, her body a straw mannequin.

It is no good veiling ourselves with masks, putting make up on them. Perhaps we only accentuate the imperfections of the hidden face, yet it would be pointless to tire of these games, better to pile it on more.?

I want to change skin. Tear the old one from me.

Why am I unravelled the minute I close my eyes?

Chapter IX H U M (fear)

The whiteness of hands, of all skin visible or guessed at.
The phantom is complete.

The most insignificant puppet believes herself as unique,
as the Virgin Mary.

In a flattering mirror God smiles at his mouth as he applies
lipstick.

I enter. I put myself between them. Never again will He
forget that Medusa herself was made in his image.

Confused amid the invisible, all of you unbelievers will pass
right through me, without hurting yourselves, without
even knowing.

May He come at last, the Magnate, the Catalyst, the
shadowy beauty. Always active and never broken into.
The one who does not go from door to door proclaiming
his power. The one who will enter my body without
knocking, let him come.

After him, strong from him, all I will have to do is appear.

As soon as I come out of my dreams and imagine making
my entry into the World, I hear doors slam shut. The
curtain was raised five times, maybe six, But in the end it
stayed down, on the actor.



Sarah Pucill, *Mannequin*, 2014, Photographic print from negative.

I remain alone with my prey, quivering, about to escape from my grasp. Alone in a crowd that is blurred, spreading out into the distance, poring over a problem of insufficient gifts.

END NOTES

Claude Cahun, edited from *Aveux non avenues* by Sarah Pucill. Translated by Rachel Gomme.

CURATOR'S NOTES

By Karen Le Roy Harris

Growing up in Jersey and living in London, the exhibition *Magic Mirror* is a place where my two worlds collide.

My childhood was spent in St Brelade's bay, Jersey where Cahun lived and is buried. Many of the scenes depicted in the show are both familiar and deeply connected to my own history. I've had the opportunity to visit Cahun's collections many times on the island and I'm thrilled to be able to share such an important collection of work with new audiences. Meeting artist Sarah Pucill enabled me to see Cahun in a new light not just through the animation of her images but also through the deep rooted connections Sarah shares with Cahun and her work, from her earlier work to her latest film *Magic Mirror*.

Both Cahun and Pucill share an autobiographic perception to their exploration of the 'self' as a fluid and permeable state, uneasily pinned down and defined.

Cahun's many selves masquerade through her photography and her resistance to being bound by any one conformist category is clear; she remains ambiguous. The intersection of Pucill's practice with Cahun's adds to the layering and further complexity of the work. Pucill's re-staging of Cahun's tableaux vivants and visualisation of her writing not only transforms the medium and limitations of the time in which it was made, but it also further questions authorship and identity as Cahun and Pucill become interwoven. As intended the exhibition curation becomes a collaboration of both artists' work, with Cahun's being placed in a shared contemporary voice and experience to which it sits so comfortably, despite some of her works being made nearly 100 years ago.

The exhibition allows the viewer to become familiar with both Cahun and Pucill whilst passing back and fourth through both artists' work and forms - writing, photography, film, spoken word. Within this layering of work and resistance to clear definition and separation between the artists, Cahun's fluid and ambiguous self remains.

Magic Mirror forms part of the Nunnery Gallery's 2015 programme, *In Dialogue*, a year-long exploration of partnerships, artistic inspirations and deeply involved relationships between the artist and the muse.

Magic Mirror coincides with the Jersey Heritage's landmark retrospective of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore: - *A Life Defiant*, in Jersey Channel Islands.

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore
— A LIFE DEFIANT —
25 March - 6 September 2015
Jersey Museum and Art Gallery

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