



Remedios Varo, *La Huida (The Escape)*, 1961, oil on canvas, 48 1/2 x 38 1/2".

MEXICO CITY

Remedios Varo

MUSEO DE ARTE MODERNO MEXICO

Paseo de la Reforma y Gandhi Bosque de Chapultepec

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The paintings of Remedios Varo are fraught with supernatural hassles. Men become cats and cats become leaves. Chairs grow pincers, mechanicalimps on wheels run the streets, and overflowing goblets cause flash floods. Still, the androgynous, almond-eyed inhabitants of Varo's sci-fi world seem used to these kinds of inconveniences. The woman in *Presencia inquietante* (Distressing Presence), 1959, for instance, looks more annoyed than alarmed by the phantom about to lick the nape of her neck. This work, a pencil study for an equally droll painting, currently hangs at the Museo de Arte Moderno, where Varo's last major show occurred nearly fifty years ago.

Varo, who was born near Girona, Spain, in 1908, led a bohemian life in Barcelona and Paris before emigrating to Mexico City, where she died a local icon in 1963. Her international fame has exploded in time with the recent fervor for Florine Stettheimer and other overlooked

women of the avant-garde. For fans raised on grainy JPEGs, the show offers a rare chance to revel in Varo's painterly pyrotechnics. She used decalomania, the aleatory blotting technique favored by Max Ernst, to create trippy mottled skies in unlikely combination with obsessively precise geometry. Strands of spectral hair and blades of grass speak to an arsenal of needle-thin brushes. Masterpieces hang alongside early experiments and commercial projects, including cards Varo designed for a pharmaceutical company anthropomorphizing afflictions from rheumatic pain to insomnia, as well as vitrines of amethyst beads, chessmen, pre-Columbian figurines, and other personal treasures. Varo emerged from a Surrealist milieu, but her work recalls that of the movement's forebears (Giorgio de Chirico) and its misfits (Joseph Cornell) more so than its main players. This exhibition reveals these affinities but, more than anything, it testifies to Varo's particular blend of mysticism, metaphysics, natural history, and anachronistic whimsy. In *Naturaleza Muerta Resucitando* (Still Life Reviving), 1963, a tablecloth eddies around a central candlestick while plates and large apples levitate to orbit the flame like high-speed planets. The image, one of Varo's last, is a fitting expression of her own enigmatic magnetism and singular brilliance.

— Zoë Lescaze