



Exhibition Review

Spirituality in Insanity, Revelation from Beyond; Paulina Peavy and Lacamo's Cosmic Interpretations at Andrew Edlin Gallery

Alexandria Deters | September 25, 2019

Divine intervention, a calling larger than yourself. An unknown entity telling you the 'truth', the reason for being, what we need to do as the human race to continue to evolve and move forward. A messiah? A prophet?

If you were to hear a voice, see a vision that no one else witnessed or saw, what would you do? Would you tell someone? Would you question your sanity? Chug a bunch of tequila and hope you stop hearing/seeing things? Or listen. Watch. And choose to believe?

During a séance in 1932 Los Angeles(i), the late artist Paulina Peavy (1901 – 1999) chose the latter, and with that began a decades long 'relationship' and collaboration with the entity from the future that she knew as 'Lacamo.' We are able to see the results of this collaboration in *Paulina Peavy/Lacamo: They Call us Unidentified*, curated by Bill Arning, at Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.



Lacamo, a future alien entity existing beyond the ideas of gender, educated Peavy in spirituality, mysticism, and most importantly "revealed to her a future in which a female-based single sex reproduction would make men redundant(ii).....[through] mankind's evolution to an androgynous one-sex through contact with aliens."(iii) And with this revelation began to construct an intricate new belief system that explained the history of the past, present, and what would come in the future.(iv)

Curator Bill Arning couldn't help but to see the striking similarities to future feminist movements and theories in Lacamo's teachings. Lacamo's teachings, and view of men as a 'unnecessary evil' that would soon become redundant in one-gender society, sound like a more subdued version of the famed would-be Andy Warhol Assassinator, Valerie Solanas, infamous feminist text, *SCUM Manifesto* (1968)(v). Yet, when reading more of Lacamo's teachings to Peavy over the years, Lacamo went beyond what would later be called 2nd Wave Feminism, and dove into almost an interstellar version of queer/gender theories of today, such as famed feminist/queer scholar Judith Butler, and the theories she put forth around gender and sexuality in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990).

Once Peavy started receiving, and accepting, Lacamo's teachings, she did what any good prophet would do, she shared them with the world. Throughout the rest of her life she dedicated herself to "promoting her worldview and various philosophies through drawing, painting, sculpture, text and film."(vi) This dedication can be seen during the exhibition in the backroom where a five minute clip of her film *The Artist Behind the Mask* (1985)(vii) is projected on the wall. A strong male voice narrates Lacamo's teachings, while the camera provides a dreamy collage of paintings. To the left of the playing video are a small selection of her masks, giving the viewer a taste of what it may have been like for Peavy in one of her trance-induced communications with Lacamo.



Installation view of *Paulina Peavy/Lacamo: They Call us Unidentified*, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York (September 6 - October 19, 2019). Image courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York (Photo by Olya Vysotskaya)
Green Black Cat, n.d. Mixed media, 10 x 12.50 x 0.50 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York (Photo by Adam Reich)

One of the ways Peavy was able to channel and receive Lacamo's teachings was by wearing fantastical masks she created. Her masks were her vehicles for a self-induced trance that would take over her all body, with her voice changing to emphasize her transition into Lacamo.(viii) These masks, each uniquely different in fabric and design, are art pieces within themselves, and if one did not know better may confuse them for extravagant masks one sees at Mardi Gras. Similarly to how those masks are worn and used, Peavy believed that once her mask was on it "facilitated her transition into a deep trance, allowing her to communicate directly with Lacamo, who then moved Peavy's brush across canvas or paper."(ix) Her masks, bejeweled, delicate, (*Green Black Cat*, n.d.), while for her a vehicle to the great beyond, are now permanently parked in this reality as pieces of art.

Once in her trance she would create otherworldly works that she believed (and hoped) represented Lacamo's teaching. Her large-scale paintings at first appear very much of the style of the early 20th century, large in scale, dark, dramatic, similar to the murals produced in 1930s America and Mexico. While there is no documentation to show that she attended art school(x), she did attend college in Portland, OR, where she most likely was exposed to the popular 'Mexican Muralism' style made by popular by artist Diego Rivera. Peavy even exhibited alongside Rivera during the Golden Gate International Exposition (1939-1940) with her 6 x 14-foot panel that she titled the *Last Supper*.

The style and life journey of Peavy's the *Last Supper*, later the *Crystallization of Matter*, illustrates not only Lacamo's evolving teachings to her, but also the stylistic influences Peavy encountered during her life. This work, which can only be seen on her website, was continually revised and reworked by Peavy that the original work was eventually "obscured by layers of oil paint and glazes and a mosaic of lambent, cubist, pyramid forms. Her representational image was essentially transformed into an abstraction."(xi) *Crystallization of Matter*, is just one example of how Peavy visually represented Lacamo's evolving philosophy but more importantly the displays Peavy's own personal journey with of the style and aesthetic changes in art that influenced her.

Peavy, having lived almost the entire 20th century, was able to unconsciously give us a visual symphony of some of the best art, design, and style trends of that century through her continually revisiting of this work and others per Lacamo's direction.

While *Crystallization of Matter* no longer exists to be seen in person, the paintings that curator Bill Arning chose to exhibit, are a worthy substitute to this work.



Untitled, 1940s – 1950s, c.1980, Oil
on board, 72 x 48 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Edlin
Gallery, New York (Photo by Adam Reich)

Her large *Untitled* paintings with faces and geometric shapes coming out of ribbons and streams of color, seem at once out of place and in perfect harmony. The brushstroke and style changing throughout a piece, style of a brushstroke, the layering of an image on another...it is because of this that also make dating her works, especially her paintings, is an impossible task.

Her constant revisitation of her works is seen most obviously with her works on paper. While staring at one, I couldn't help but squint, trying to see the previous layers, doing this I could almost feel the previous life of the piece and what it was trying to tell.

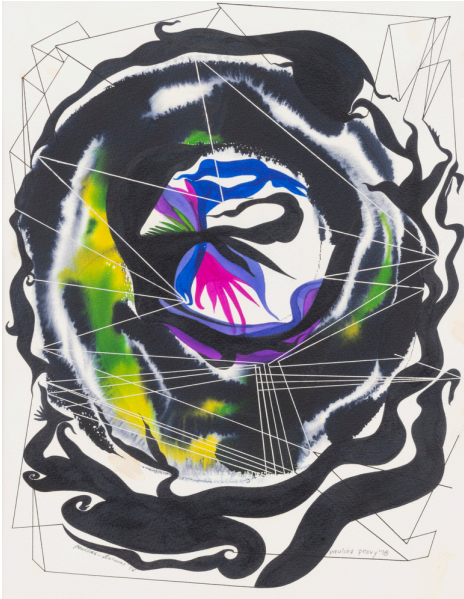
It was these works that my eyes kept going back to, the story they were telling made me stop and visually listen.

Each work appears like a portal into another dimension, a foreign time and place, not of the past or present, but of the future. Her almost tie-dye approach to watercolor reminded me of a colorful Milky Way galaxy with blacked out angles and shapes. The feeling of gazing into the ever expanding universe was Peavy's intention, she designed in this way so that a person could plausibly perceive "the essence of the universe, namely the atomic spirits jettisoning about space as well as the awesome moment of creation. The images are abstract, in keeping with her perception of the cosmos, but they are nonetheless filled with symbolic forms."(xii)

These ideas don't seem out of place today, this imagery feels almost recognizable to what people create at Burning Man or the style of galaxy-like wear seen at EDC raves; bright, cosmic, a movement, a mixture of shapes evolving into new forms.

While writing this, I am stating her encounters, her experiences, the theories that Lacamo told her, as fact. That the philosophy Lacamo shared with her has groundings in reality.

But the reality is, we have no idea if any of this happened, that a séance awakened a being that only Peavy saw and was able to communicate with, and was able to contact for decades. In actuality it is more likely that Peavy was a high functioning person with a mental illness, and during the time she had her first 'encounter' with Lacamo, she lived in a United States that was actively looking for new answers, new ways of understanding the universe. In plain speak; the world was open to hearing people like Peavy out about their ideas, rather than just writing them off as nonsense. The world was trying to comprehend how spirituality and science can live together in harmony, when at scientific discoveries and theories were starting to disprove our how we previously had comprehended through world around us through various religions and spiritualities.



Untitled, 1975-1978, Watercolor and ink on paper, 14 x 10 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York (Photo by Adam Reich)

Artists of the past had tried to answer these apparent contradictions, such as [Hilma af Klint](#) (1862-1944), whose teachings struck such a chord with others she was able to form her own community of fellow believers. Later other types of creatives and philosophers shared their ideas, like [L. Ron Hubbard](#) and his 'discovery' of 'dianetics' (soon to rebranded as the religion Scientology) and gained not only a community, but an entire following that even to present day, stretches the globe.

Peavy was not the only artist, nor would she be the last, that 'communicated' with an unknown entity, and through that communication discovered new exotic answers to understanding the universe and our propose. French outsider artist Henriette Zéphir (1920-2012), also believed, what she called, a "Guide" communicated with her, and just how Lacamo communicated with Peavy, it was Zéphir's 'Guide' that took over her body when she created her art. Similar to Peavy, Zéphir's ideas were listened to and her art work was exhibited and appreciated during her life. A contemporary example would be internet sensation, Valeria Lukyanova (xiii), the Ukrainian woman known as the human-Barbie, who believes she too can communicate with aliens, and has learned through that communication a new way of understanding the world that she needs to share.

Yet for the dozens of recognized celebrities, artists, philosophers, that have cult followings and even true believers in their messages that they have been 'given' (either by some other unknown entity, alien, or even god) to them; thousands are

labeled as mental ill and are and have been: institutionalized, medicated, not believed, and it is only with their death that their fantasies and delusions are discovered and shared.(xiv) Why is some ideas seen as ramblings while others as the roots to a new way of understanding? It is my belief that in Peavy's case, it was most likely because she lived in California and New York, two places that have been historically open to new ideas..... or maybe because Peavy really did speak with an alien from the future.



Installation view of Paulina Peavy/Lacamo: They Call us Unidentified, Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York (September 6 - October 19, 2019).Image courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York (Photo by Olya Vysotskaya)

Paulina Peavy/Lacamo: They Call us Unidentified, on view at Andrew Edlin Gallery, is Peavy's first New York solo exhibition where her 'collaborator' Lacamo is fully credited, rather than just acknowledged as Peavy's influence/muse, or not at all. What does it mean when we hear a voice, or encounter the unknown? Do we tell someone what we have learned? Do we disregard the ideas and theories that are entering our minds as nonsense? Or do we create art to convey our ideas and hope someone listens, understands, and believes too?

In reality, isn't that what every artist is trying to do, push their view and understanding of the world on others?

Maybe every artist has a Lacamo, only known by a different name. Artistic genius.

Paulina Peavy/Lacamo: They Call us Unidentified , curated by Bill Arning is on view through October 19, 2019 at Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York, NY.