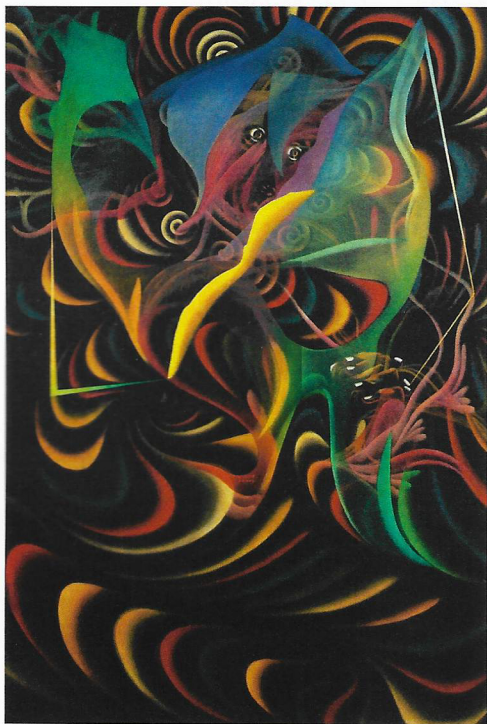


NEW YORK

## Paulina Peavy and Lacamo

ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY

Paulina Peavy (1901–1999), an artist who witnessed nearly a century of culture flash before her eyes, was hardly recognized in her lifetime for her abstractions. Perhaps that's because she never conformed to reigning styles and instead remained devoted to her own inner voice—or, rather, a voice from a higher dimension. Nearly all of Peavy's works were made in collaboration with a nonhuman entity



Paulina Peavy and Lacamo, *Untitled*, ca. 1945–ca. 1980, oil on board, 72 × 48".

named Lacamo. She often channeled this “ghost spirit” while wearing magnificently jeweled masks that she designed, several of which held court in the back room of the Andrew Edlin Gallery this fall. The show, curated by Bill Arning, gathered enough of Peavy and Lacamo's paintings and works on paper to build a solid case for why their art needs to be reconsidered anew, particularly given the recent revivals of works by the visionaries Hilma af Klint and Agnes Pelton.

In 1932, Peavy began attending séances conducted by the spiritualist and trance medium Ida L. Ewing in Southern California. This became a regular habit over the next ten years, as Peavy first encountered Lacamo here. Peavy was primed for a transformation after leaving her abusive husband and quickly became enthralled by the secrets of the universe Lacamo shared with her, part of a cosmology wherein men were deemed redundant and women could reproduce on their own. The duo also believed that humanity was slowly evolving into total androgyny, slouching toward “one-gender perfection.”

Mutability is a refrain in the biomorphic and untitled oil-on-board paintings Peavy and Lacamo revisited and repainted between the 1930s and the '80s (the works were utilized as tools for edifying a worldview, and so they were often amended throughout the years). Over vast stretches of time, the artist and her guide layered thin washes of color to produce a greater sense of depth and illumination; some of the works even seem to harbor an inner light.

Two untitled seventy-two-by-forty-eight-inch paintings—spanning decades in their production—brought forward surprisingly figurative elements: Faces and hands in prayer poke out from a tornado of swirling pigments signifying energy waves. Are these self-portraits of Peavy surrounded by Lacamo's presence? Or are these spinning trundles closer to depictions and descriptions of Christian angels as wheels—from the whirlwinds of fire known as *ophanim*, as explained in Ezekiel to the Rosicrucian lords of the flame? Often such beings are ranked as closest to the divine, the bearers of the throne.

Rounding out the show were nineteen works on paper. Made with watercolor and ink (and sometimes strips of Letraset), these pieces evoked origins through organic shapes variously resembling ova, sperm, and fetuses. The earliest drawing in the show, *Noah, Legume Genesis*, 1953, looked like a battle between overlapping fallopian tubes. More abstract and untitled illustrations, mostly from the '80s, conjured blazes pulsing in dark matter or black holes—universes imploding and exploding that Peavy and Lacamo desperately sought to portray.

Some people use the word *peavy* to describe a person they deem to be heterodox, for whatever reason. I used to think that all artists are peavy at their core, but these days I'm not so sure. I suppose that's why I've long been interested in cast-out mystics and heretics, such as Peavy, who put no limits on revealing their love and their piety, their pleasure and pain, in their words and art.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler