

Paulina Peavy: Astrocultural Messenger

Curated by Laura Whitcomb

September 14 – October 28, 2023

While Paulina Peavy's (1901-1999) life spanned the twentieth century, her art and belief system represent a crucible for our current moment. She challenged gender norms and racial divides, revitalized hermetic and matriarchal systems, embraced cult traditions, and played a vital role in a community of groundbreaking artists. She saw herself as an emissary, a messenger for advanced beings contextualized through the phenomenon of UFOs. A radical innovator, Peavy would become the first established fine artist to be publicly associated with the movement known as *astroculture*.

Peavy was guided by a bodiless entity identified as Lacamo, whom she purported to have first encountered at a Los Angeles séance in 1932. Peavy would devote the remainder of her life to espousing the cosmology that "UFO spirit" imparted to her, which included the belief that humankind was evolving into a single sex species and that life cycles renewed themselves in twelve-thousand-year increments in a progression from chaos to Utopia. She was also deeply immersed in the study of ancient cultures, especially the Egyptians, probing the reaches of available esoteric literature and philosophy, thereby joining the ranks of other women channeler-artists including Hilma Af Klint, Georgiana Houghton, Emma Kunz, Agnes Pelton, and Ithell Colquhoun.

In 1927, Peavy attended the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, where she joined a community that included members of the first American abstract art movement, Synchronism, as well as Hans Hofmann, for whom she served as a teaching assistant. Later, she established her own gallery and salon where artists explored the dynamics of the unseen, paving the way for her eventual immersion into Spiritualism.

The exhibition includes seven paintings commissioned for and displayed at San Francisco's Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939. With these works, Peavy aimed to reframe our understanding of Biblical figures, presenting them as archetypes of higher meaning that had been misrepresented by patriarchal systems throughout history. Solo exhibitions of Peavy's work were held throughout the 1930s and 1940s, most notably three in 1935 at Gumps Gallery, San Francisco, Stendahl Gallery, Los Angeles and Delphic Studios, New York. Beginning in the late 1930s she immersed her figures in translucent bands of color, and from the 1960s to 1980s, she added abstracted crystals. Obliterating the notion of time, she continued to rework and transform canvases over some six decades.

Since being rediscovered by Katharine Armstrong roughly a decade ago, Paulina Peavy's art has been featured in several solo exhibitions including two at Andrew Edlin (2016, 2019), one at the ADAA's Art Show at the Park Avenue Armory (2022), and *Paulina Peavy: An Etherian Channeler* at Beyond Baroque, Venice, CA (2021). Her work has been seen in group shows including at *Greater New York* at MoMA PS1 (2021-22), and *Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art* presented by the Minneapolis Institute of Art, which traveled to the Toledo Museum of Art and the Speed Museum of Art, Louisville, KY (2021). It is in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, National Gallery of Art (Washington D.C.), and the Portland Museum of Art (Portland, ME).

The timing of this exhibition coincides with the gallery's publication of the first monograph on the artist, *Paulina Peavy: Etherian Channeler*, written by Laura Whitcomb, edited and with a foreword by Ilene Susan Fort (distributed by D.A.P. /Distributed Art Publishers, 224 pgs., September 2023).
