

MARCEL MOORE, her art and life

Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore were stepsisters, lovers and artistic collaborators who came together through their artistic creativity and a shared passion for books and art. While Cahun is by far the better known, Moore was equally talented, as the Jersey Heritage Trust's Curator of Art, Louise Downie, reveals.



Fig 1 Fashion illustration by Marcel Moore, 1916, watercolour

MARCEL MOORE WAS BORN SUZANNE Malherbe in Nantes in 1892. She was the talented, but less well known, stepsister of Surrealist photographer Claude Cahun (born Lucy Schwob), whose work is now receiving international acclaim. Malherbe and Schwob moved to Jersey in 1937, buying a house called La Rocquaise in St Brelade's Bay. They knew the house and the area from the many childhood holidays spent in the bay. They usually stayed at the St Brelade's Bay Hotel, owned by the Colley family, who became close friends of the Schwob/Malherbe families.

They remained in Jersey throughout the Occupation, carrying out resistance activities that eventually led to their arrest, trial and imprisonment. Freed at the Liberation, the stepsisters remained in Jersey. Schwob died in 1954. After her death Malherbe moved to a smaller house, Carola, at Beaumont. After years of loneliness and ill health, Malherbe committed suicide in 1972.

Childhood

Suzanne Alberte Eugénie Malherbe was born on 19 July 1892 at 12, Rue de Cassini in Nantes. Her father, Albert Hippolyte Malherbe, was a Professor of Histopathology at the School of Medicine. Her mother was Marie Eugénie Rondet and she had a brother, Jean.

In 1909 Malherbe met Schwob at the Lycée, a meeting that was to determine the course of their lives. Theirs was a relationship of love and artistic creativity. They shared a passion for books and art. Although she was yet to receive any formal art training, from 1913 Malherbe began publishing illustrated articles on fashion, predominantly in

the regional newspaper *Le Phare de la Loire* which was edited by Schwob's father, Maurice Schwob. In these articles, Malherbe used the pseudonym Marcel Moore. Three fashion illustrations from 1915 and 1916 (figs.1-3) show a sureness of line and a subtle use of colour and shade. They anticipate the boyish fashions in clothing and hairstyle known as *la mode garconne* that was to sweep post-war Paris.

The Great War

The First World War necessitated a radical change in fashion and accelerated the widespread adoption of dress innovations already introduced by progressive designers and adopted by the upper classes. Fashion magazines suggested that wartime fashion should be rational, practical and simple. This meant the end of the corset, a new shorter hemline (particularly practical for nurses, whose long skirts were considered unhygienic) and the use of the suit as women's uniform on the home front.¹

Moore's fashion illustration of 1915 (fig.2) aptly displays the new fashions' comfort, ease of movement and practicality. However, a key characteristic which differentiates this design is that the model wears trousers. There are images of women wearing trousers in wartime France, but these are of working women, and in particular many are of women working in fields. In Moore's design, the boyish figure stands relaxed, hands in pockets showing the comfort of the outfit. The piping along the trousers' seams and around the collar is suggestive of military clothing. Many designers took inspiration from the austerity of military clothing.

In 1917, Moore and Cahun became stepsisters when Moore's widowed mother married Cahun's divorced father. This entwining of the two daughters facilitated their artistic collaborations and provided a cover for their intimate relationship. In the same year Moore and Cahun moved into a flat on the top floor of the office building of *Le Phare de la Loire* at the Place du Commerce in Nantes.²

In 1918 Moore registered at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Nantes. She studied painting, drawing and woodcutting. She was particularly talented in drawing and was most influenced by the work of William Blake, Paul Gauguin, Aubrey Beardsley and William Morris.

Moore and Cahun's first joint publication was a book entitled *Vues et Visions* published by Georges Crès et Cie in Paris in 1919 (JHT/2003/00001/12). In 1914 the essay had been published as an article in the literary journal *Mercure de France*, when Cahun was writing under the pseudonym Claude Courlis. Moore provided illustrations for the book version of the essay. Her illustrations frame each page written by Cahun, forming a sort of theatrical proscenium and present juxtaposed paired vignettes of old and new (fig.4). In this image two weathered skiffs tethered to an abandoned pier in Le Croisic contrast with stone figures of two boys permanently united in loving proximity upon a tomb in ancient Greece. This book has been seen by some art historians as Cahun and Moore's artistic 'coming out', as it raised their profile as an artistic couple, and indirectly confirmed their affection for each other and the legitimacy of their bond.

The book's dedication is most telling, Cahun wrote "To Marcel Moore" I dedicate this puerile prose to you so that your designs may redeem my text in our eyes.' The intermingling of possessive pronouns reflects the intermingling of text and images in the book, further echoing the intimacy of their relationship.³ Another shared project, but one which did not end in publication, was a manuscript entitled 'Héroïnes';

fifteen irreverent monologues by famous women from the Bible, Greek mythology, Western children's literature and popular culture, such as Eve, Judith, Cinderella and Penelope (JHT/1995/00045/71).⁴ These characters present counter-examples of stereotypical myths of feminine behaviour, disrupting culturally established norms. Most of these monologues were published in two different journals in 1925. Perhaps, if the monologues had been published, Moore may once again have illustrated them.

Interwar Paris

In 1922 Moore and Cahun moved from provincial Nantes to metropolitan Paris. The stepsisters circulated within the vanguard circles of Parisian artistic life and were particularly active in theatrical and political groups. Their address book (stored at the Jersey Archive, reference number JHT/1995/00045/60, only



Fig 2 Fashion illustration by Marcel Moore, 1915, watercolour



Fig 3 Fashion illustration by Marcel Moore, 1916, watercolour

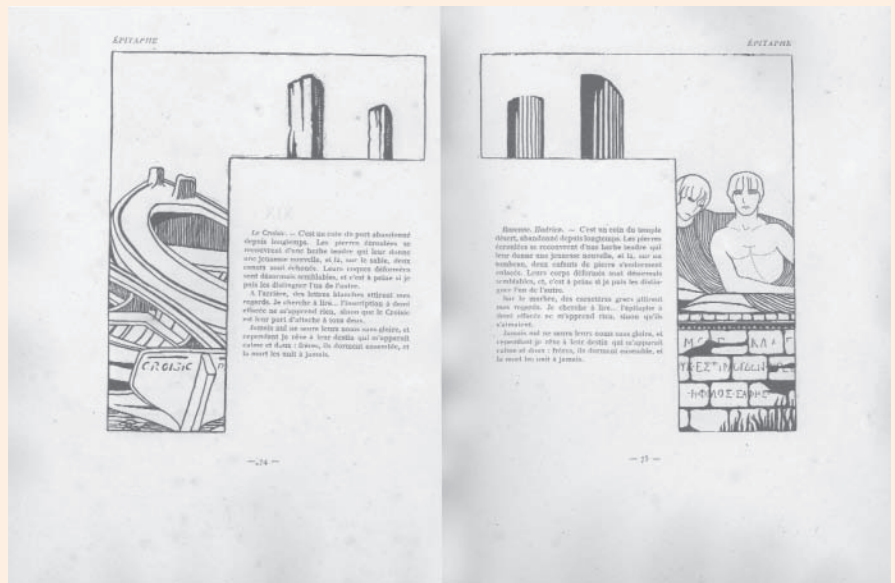


Fig 4 *Épitaphe*, pages 74 and 75 from *Vues et Visions* by Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, 1919.



Fig 5 *Georges et Ludmilla Pitoëff* by Marcel Moore, print



Fig 6 *M. Pitoëff dans Salome* by Marcel Moore, mixed media



Fig 7 Max, postcard

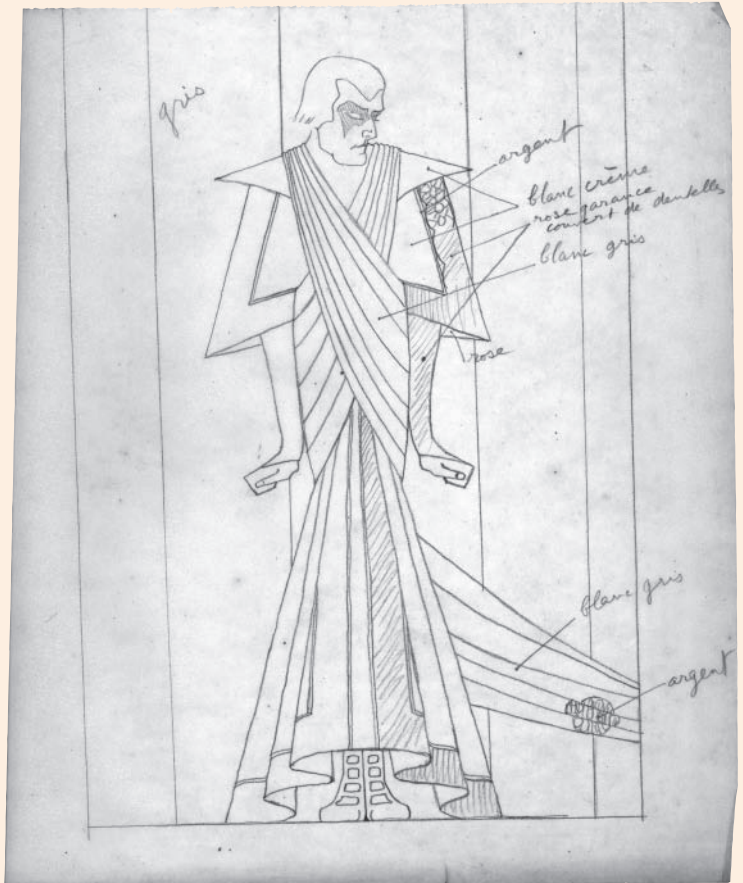


Fig 8 Costume design for de Max, c.1925, pencil

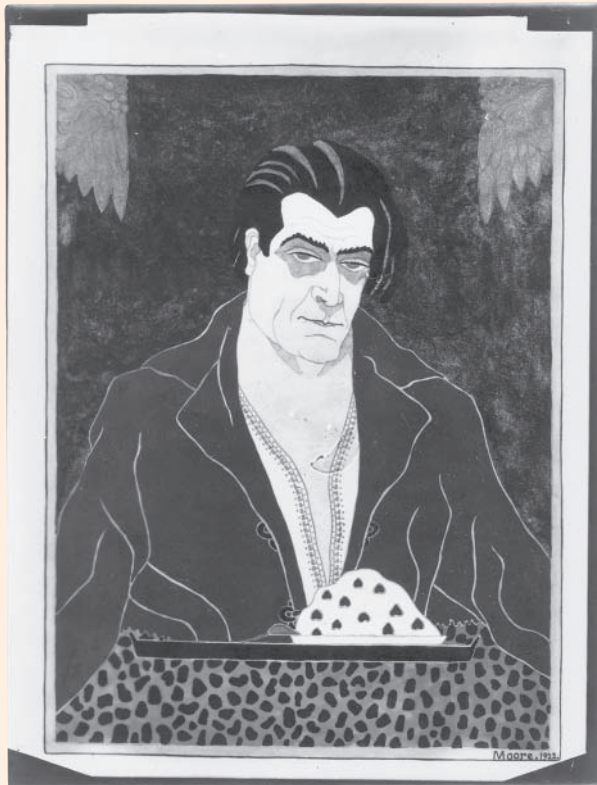


Fig 10 Max, c.1925, photograph of drawing by Marcel Moore

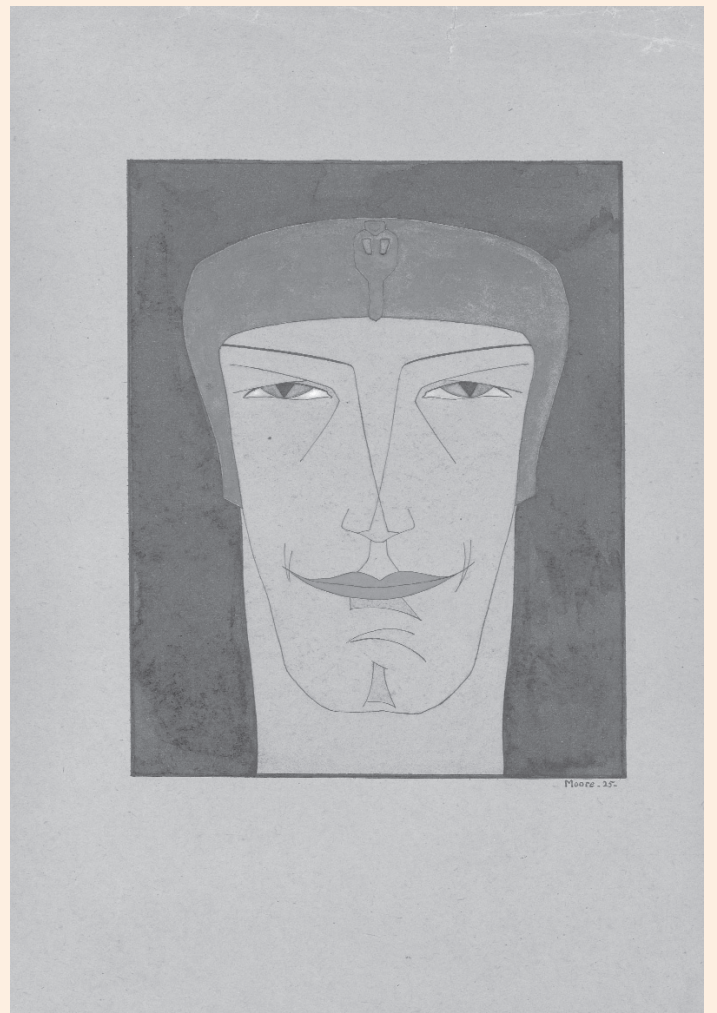


Fig 11 Max, 1925, watercolour



Fig 9 Max in Pierrot costume, c.1925, pencil

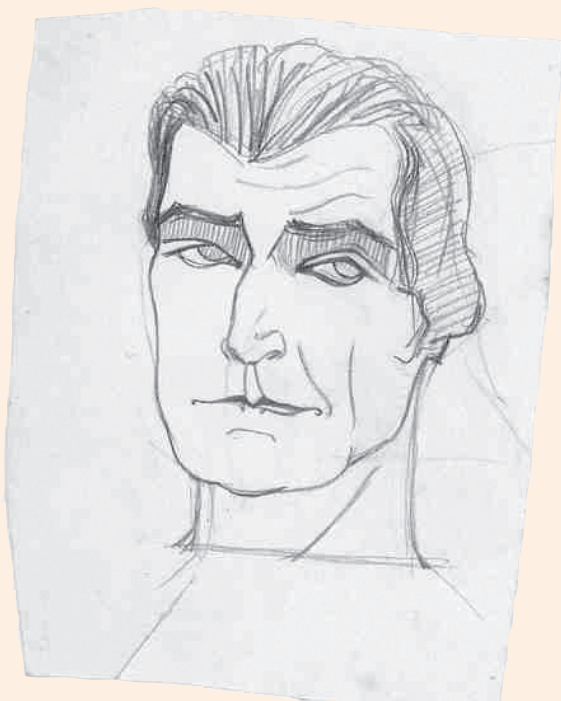


Fig 12 Max, c.1925, pencil

accessible via photocopies) attests to their association with many leading figures in the cultural and intellectual milieu of interwar Paris with addresses listed for Aragon, Breton, Bataille, Sylvia Beach, Jean Cocteau, Roger Caillois, René Crevel, Salvador Dali, Robert Desnos, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Aldous Huxley, Jacques Lacan, Henri Michaux, Man Ray, Chana Orloff, Gertrude Stein, Tristan Tzara and Yves Tanguy. It also names members of the theatrical establishment, Eduardo de Max, Marguerite Moreno, and with experimental theatre, Pierre Albert-Biro, Georges and Lamella Pitoëff (figs.5-6).

Moore seems to have particularly associated herself with avant-garde actor Edouard de Max. She created many portraits and costume designs for him. De Max began his career in 1891 and specialised in roles of decadent emperors, like Nero and Heliogabalus, and even appeared almost naked on stage in Jean Lorrain's *Prométhée* (1900). De Max surrounded himself with young homosexual artists. André Gide wrote his homosexual play *Saint* for him in 1898, although no theatre produced it until 1922. Amongst the other artists patronised by de Max was Jean Cocteau.

Those in artistic circles led the interwar French homosexual movement. A large number of homosexual books and plays were produced. Moore made many portraits of de Max (figs.7-12) – some are straightforward portraits, some show him in theatrical roles, others are costume designs for him. Moore's pictures of him show a man with strong features. He was probably often heavily made up as was, and still is, the norm for stage actors whose facial expressions must be seen by those at the back of a theatre. Moore skilfully portrays his square jaw line, deep-set eyes and wide forehead in her characteristic style. De Max's importance to Moore is reflected in the fact that she kept his obituary amongst her possessions (JHT/2003/00001/28).

In 1923, Marcel Moore designed the frontispiece for a book of poetry by Marc-Adolphe Guégan entitled *Oya-Insula ou l'Enfant à la Conque* (fig.13).

Moore often put her graphic style to good use by creating advertising material for various theatrical productions. The American expatriate dancer Beatrice Wanger renamed herself 'Nadja', and performed mostly for the Théâtre Esotérique. Moore created handbills, posters and postcards featuring the dancer (figs.14-16). An American journalist, Golda M Goldman, writing for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1929 in an article entitled 'Who's Who Abroad', wrote: 'In order to appreciate to what extremely decorative lengths the art of poster design can be carried one must study a group of pictures by the young French woman who signs her work simply "Moore".'

'To call such work poster work is almost a misnomer, for in it Mlle Moore shows a capacity for portraiture, a mastery of line both delicate and strong, a great pictorial effectiveness, and a beautiful use of colour.'

Avant-garde

In 1929, Moore and Cahun joined the avant-garde theatre group Le Plateau which was directed by Pierre Albert-Birot. Albert-Birot set out his ideas for a theatre based on dramatic and poetic expression in the theatre's magazine also called *Le Plateau*. Cahun contributed writings to this publication and Moore provided portraits of members of the company.

In 1930 Moore and Cahun published their second major collaborative publication, *Aveux non Avenus*. Again, Cahun wrote the text and Moore illustrated it. Although the photomontages that illustrate the book are most commonly ascribed to Cahun, one of them is distinctly signed Moore and they are now believed to have been collaborative works. The photomontages are collages of various photographs and illustrations by Cahun and Moore. *Aveux non Avenus* (variously translated into English as 'Disavowed Confessions' and 'Unrealised Avowals') consists of prose, alternating with poems, deconstructed fables, letters, dialogues and dream narratives in a variety of styles.

Goldman wrote: 'At present the artist is engaged in making a series of distorted photographs of her sister, which probably will be used to illustrate the volume *Aveux non Avenus*, which Claude Cahun is publishing later this year. Entirely printed by herself, these photographs are something quite new in this field.'⁷ Interestingly, she calls Marcel Moore Suzanne Moore and Claude Cahun Lucie Schwob, suggesting that at this time Moore was more established as Moore than Cahun was as Cahun.

In the 1930s, Moore and Cahun became involved in several anti-fascist groups. In 1932 they joined the *Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires*, where they met surrealist leader André Breton. Occasionally Moore signed the political pamphlets written by Breton, with much input from Cahun. Whilst Cahun was active in taking part in meetings, demonstrations and publications, Moore was active behind the scenes.

In Jersey

In 1937 Moore and Cahun left Paris for Jersey. They purchased a house, La Rocquaise in St Brelade's Bay. Their exact reasons for leaving Paris and choosing to live in Jersey are unknown but it is possible to speculate. They knew Jersey from many childhood holidays. Perhaps they were disillusioned with the political climate in Paris and disturbed by the political divisions causing their circle of friends to break up.

When living in Jersey, the stepsisters tended to call themselves by their given names. Moore was even known by some as 'Bertie' a shortening of her second name Alberte. Although they had a small circle of mostly French-speaking friends and often held card-playing evenings, they were a private couple. They were known locally as being a bit strange, wearing modern clothing (trousers for example!) and nude sunbathing.



Fig 13 Frontispiece design for *Oya Insula*, 1923, print



Fig 14 Nadja, c.1910, postcard

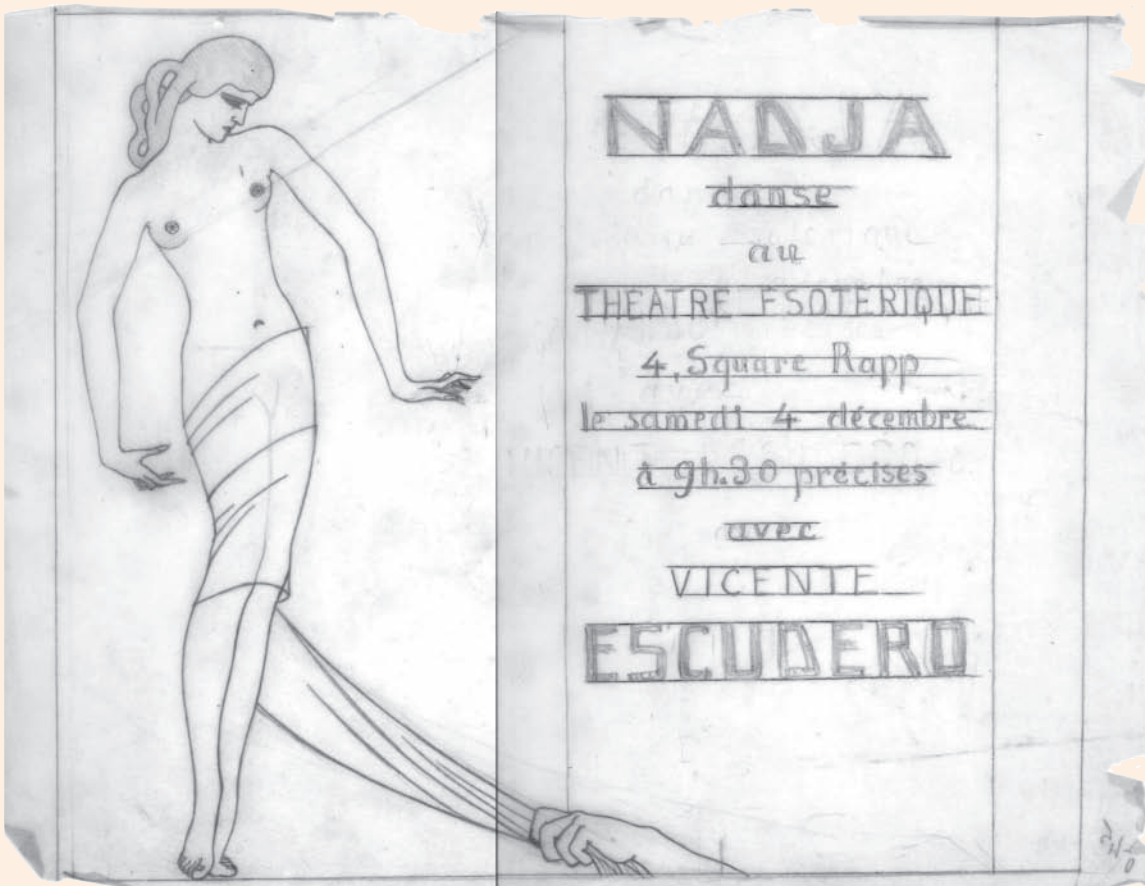


Fig 15 Nadja, c.1910, pencil

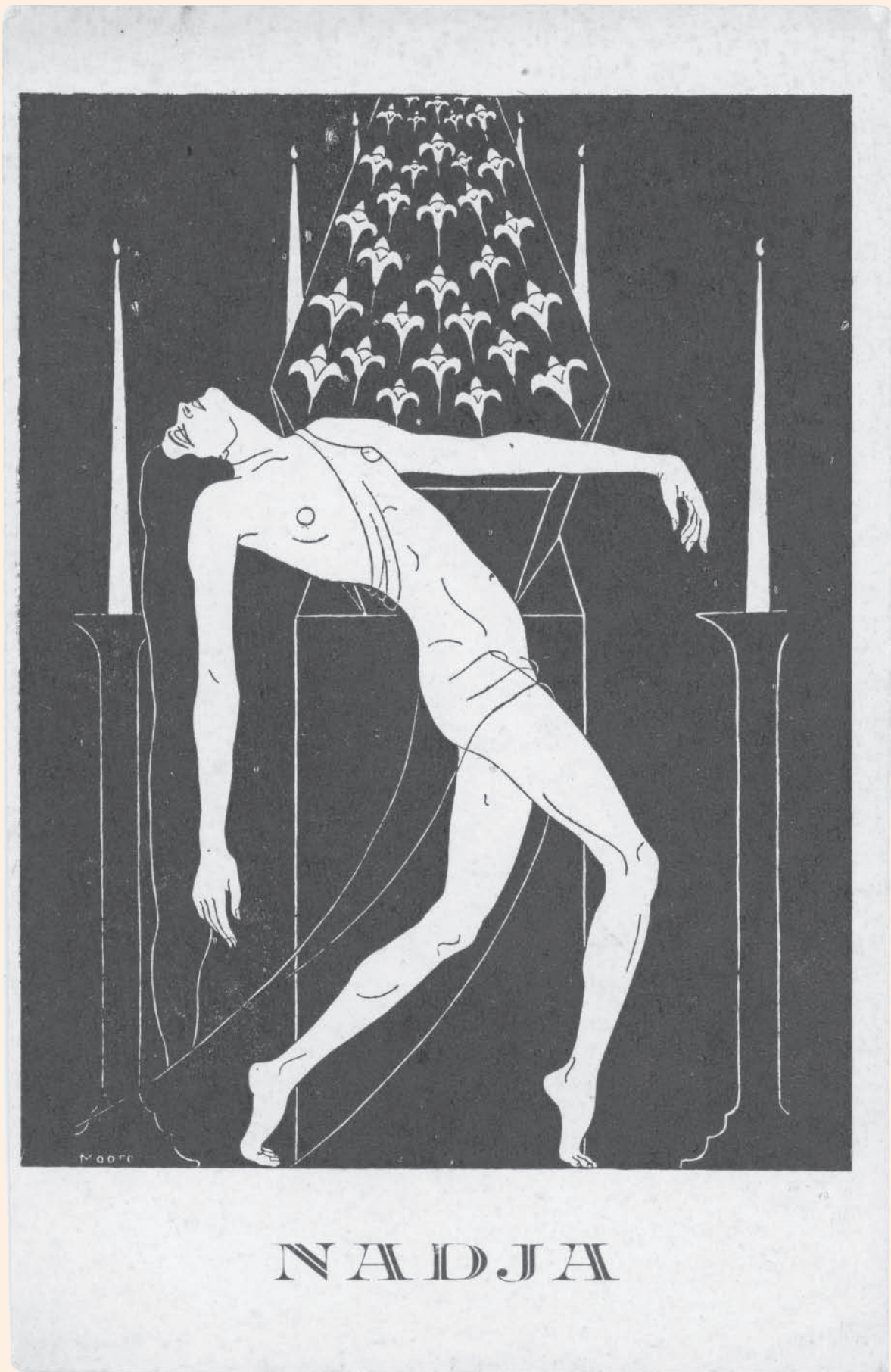


Fig 16 *Nadja* Théâtre Esotérique, c.1924, postcard

Moore and Cahun corresponded with friends in Paris and were visited in Jersey by Jacqueline Lamba, surrealist painter and wife of André Breton, and by Henri Michaux, a poet and artist.

Their sanctuary was disrupted in 1940 when German forces invaded the Island. Moore and Cahun made a conscious decision to remain in Jersey rather than returning to Paris or evacuating to England. Much of their political activity in the 1930s had been anti-fascist in nature. During the Occupation they put much of this anti-fascist sentiment into actual resistance by carrying out counter-propaganda activities aimed at demoralising German soldiers by suggesting that there was a feeling of unrest and simmering dissention amongst the German ranks.

An Evening Post journalist interviewed the stepsisters shortly after the Liberation and described them as ‘animated by a burning love of their country and a deep hatred of the Boche’.⁸ Moore described how the stepsisters had started their activities: ‘it all started in 1940 in a small way and grew as time went on. We always listened to the BBC and any other news we could get which was not tainted by Boche propaganda, and it made us perfectly sick to hear the so-called “news” put out by Radio Paris, so we decided to run a news service of our own for the benefit of the German troops.

‘We were inspired by the broadcasts by “Colonel Britton” on the European service of the BBC and used to take the salient points, translate them into German on small pieces of paper which were typed by my sister, and sign them “The nameless German soldier”. We distributed them by

placing them in cigarette, paper cartons, matchboxes, and so on and placed them in German cars when and where we could. We used to make special trips to St Helier for this purpose.’⁹

Defiance

Moore had defied a German order for all German speakers to declare themselves, so she remained undetected. The tracts they produced evolved over the years and as well as passing on news, the stepsisters wrote poems and anti-propaganda statements (figs.17-19). They would produce multiple copies of the same tract by using carbon paper in their typewriter: ‘The Underwood allowed for ten to twelve carbon copies in one single go...Knowing that I could not give the police the impression of several typewriters, I made an effort to vary the way of tapping the keys and the presentation to give the impression of several typists.’¹⁰

The stepsisters used the location of their home to good advantage. La Rocquaise was next to St Brelade’s Church and cemetery, which is where the Germans also had their military cemetery. During funeral services the sisters would drop their leaflets into German staff cars.¹¹

Cahun and Moore continued these activities until 25th July 1944, when Cahun believed they were informed upon by the vendor of the cigarette paper – the usual wrappings for the tracts. On that day they had been into St Helier to distribute their propaganda. On the way home, their bus was stopped and searched by the Gestapo.

‘The vendor of these cartons had indicated to them the activists. We recognised her on the bus. It is clear that this is

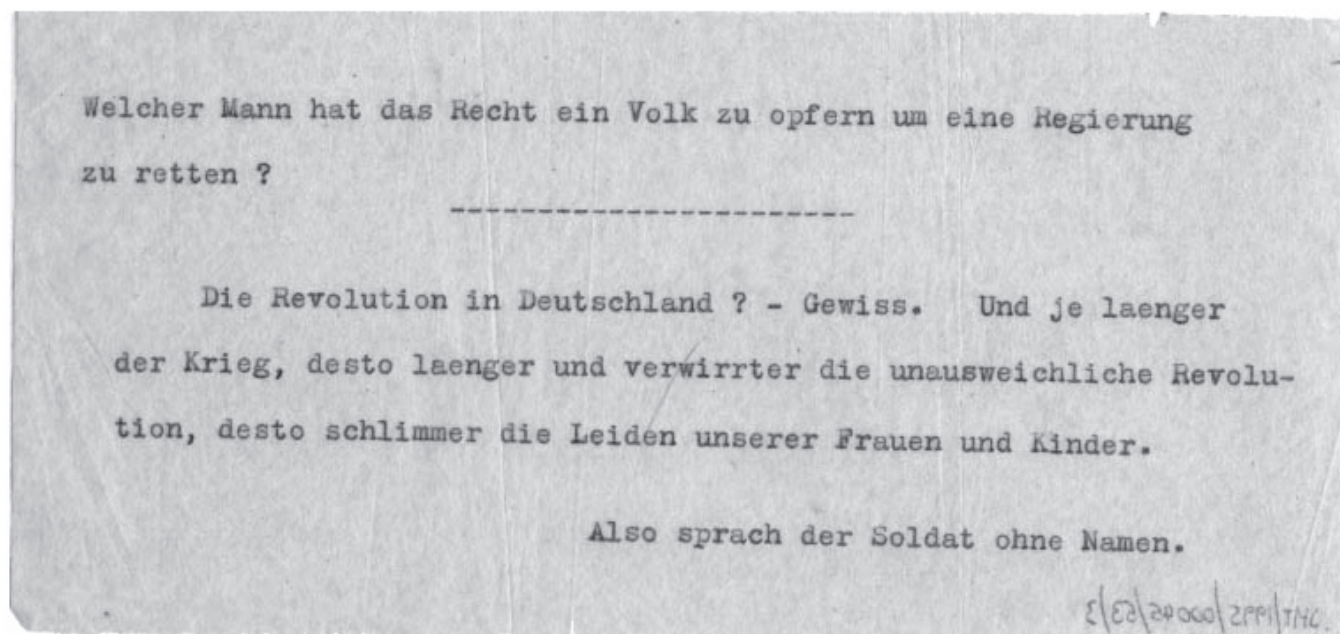


Fig 17 Propaganda leaflet

HITLER führt uns...
 GOEBBELS spricht für uns...
 GOERING frisst für uns...
 LEY trinkt für uns...
 HIMMLER?...Himmler ermordet
 für uns...
 Aber niemand stirbt
 für uns!

21/53/24000/2PP1/THG

Fig 18 Propaganda leaflet

Dümmkopf! Man heisst dir nur,
 eine geringe Sache! Dass die
 sterben sollst, so dass der Führer
 ein wenig länger leben möge!

Ach! wäre ich doch lieber gefangen!
 - Wenn die dich ergibst, da wirst
 du ~~vor~~ dem Offizier erschossen
 werden.
 - Er mag nur kommen! Mit
 einem solchen Offizier schiesse
 ich der erste!

der Soldat ohne Namen

21/53/24000/2PP1/THG

Fig 19 Propaganda leaflet



Fig 20 St Aubin's Bay, c.1965, by Marcel Moore

where it happened. A German military took the bus, the one taking us back to St Brelade. During the trip he inspected the identification documents of the passengers – commonplace enough not to alert us. Thus they had confirmed the suspect name.’¹²

Imprisonment

That evening the Gestapo searched their house and found a suitcase containing several propaganda tracts. Cahun and Moore were arrested and taken to Newgate Street prison. They had anticipated their arrest and resolved to commit suicide. They had set aside a ‘mortal dose of barbiturates’ disguised in a Milk of Magnesia bottle. After brief questioning, Cahun and Moore were put in a cell, where they were found unconscious later that night. Their hospitalisation delayed their trial, and probably also prevented them being deported to a prison camp as by the time they were both well enough to stand trial the Allies had liberated St Malo.

Shortly after being released Cahun was once more hospitalised when a German doctor prescribed too-strong medicine for a bladder disorder. At the same time, Moore once again tried to commit suicide by cutting her wrists. When not hospitalised the women were in solitary confinement. Their trial eventually started on 16th November 1944. Moore commented on the trial: ‘We were taken for trial, if you can call it a trial; all they did was read out our statement and sentence us. A German officer was detailed to “defend” us and he told the court that it was most unpleasant to have to defend such people.’¹³ Moore commented during the trial ‘the defence is much more bitter against us than the prosecution’.¹⁴

One of the judges, *Oberst* Sarmsen, summed up saying their actions: ‘Could not be considered as a moral crime...You are franc-tireurs [partisans]...even though you used spiritual arms instead of firearms. It is indeed a more serious crime. With firearms, one knows at once what damage had been done, but with spiritual arms, one cannot tell how far-reaching it may be.’¹⁵

They were sentenced to death for undermining the morale of the German Forces, six months’ penal servitude for listening to the BBC and to six months for having arms and a camera. Moore and Cahun refused to sign letters of appeal. The Bailiff sent a plea for clemency and the French Consul, Henry Duval, met with Baron von Aufsess to talk about a reprieve. In February 1945 the stepsisters learnt that their death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment. Moore and Cahun remained in prison until the very last day of German Occupation. They were eventually released on 8th May, just 15 minutes before Winston’s Churchill’s famous speech. They returned home to discover German soldiers had pillaged it.

Cahun died in 1954, leaving Moore to spend the remainder of her life alone. Moore moved to a smaller

house, Carole in Beaumont. There are no art works dated during this period. Moore seems to have concentrated on photography. The photographs she created during this period seem curiously void of a subject. They are as lonely in atmosphere as Moore seems to have been without her lifelong lover, Claude Cahun, (fig. 20). Marcel Moore took her own life in 1972.

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Footnotes

¹ Champsaur, Florence Brachet ‘French Fashion during the First World War’, *Business and Economic History On-Line*, Vol.2, 2004, p.3.

² For further information on Moore and Cahun’s early life, see Kristine von Oehsen’s essay ‘The Lives of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore’ in *Don’t Kiss Me The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, Jersey Heritage Trust and Tate Publishing, 2006.

³ See Tirza Latimer’s essay ‘Acting Out: Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore’ in *Don’t Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, Jersey Heritage Trust and Tate Publishing, 2006.

⁴ Translated into English by Norman MacAfee and published in *Inverted Odysseys: Claude Cahun, Maya Deren and Cindy Sherman*, Rice, Sheeley (ed.), MIT Press, 1999.

⁵ See Katharine Conley’s essay ‘Claude Cahun’s Counter-Archival Héroïnes’ in *Don’t Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, Jersey Heritage Trust and Tate Publishing, 2006.

⁶ Golda M. Goldman, ‘Who’s Who Abroad: Suzanne Moore’, *Chicago Tribune*, European Edition, December 1929, (JHT2003/00001/27).

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *Jersey Weekly Post*, July 14, 1945.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Cahun, Claude ‘Le muet dans la mêlée’, 1948, in Leperlier, François (ed.) *Claude Cahun Écrits*, Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 2002, pp.627-28. Translated by Kristine von Oehsen.

¹¹ See Claire Follain’s essay ‘Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe – Résistantes’ in *Don’t Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, Jersey Heritage Trust and Tate Publishing, 2006.

¹² Cahun in Leperlier, 2002, pp.630-31.

¹³ *Jersey Weekly Post*, July 14, 1945.

¹⁴ From a letter to Paul Levy dated 3 July, 1950 in Leperlier, 2002, p.714. Translated by Claire Follain.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.720.