



Carol Finn

LEONOR FINI (1908-1996)**Portrait of Pao Ying**

Signed lower right, "Leonor Fini"

oil on panel

15 1/2 x 10 1/4 in. (19 7/8 x 14 5/8 x 1 1/2 in.)

39.37 x 26.04 cm (50.48 x 37.15 x 3.81 cm)

c. 1960

42625

PROVENANCE:

Pao Ying, Milan (acquired directly from the artist)

Private Collection

Heather James Fine Art, acquired from the above

EXHIBITION:

Milan, Galleria Tommaso Calabro, Leonor Fini. Italian Fury. As dreamed by
Francesco Vezzoli, 1 April – 25 June 2022

LITERATURE:

R. Overstreet and N. Zuckerman, Leonor Fini Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil
Paintings, Vol. II, Zurich, 2021, no. 623, p. 394 (illustrated in colour)

Leonor Fini (1907 – 1996) was born in Argentina, grew up in Italy, and spent much of her adult life in Paris working alongside such modern masters as Max Ernst, Andre Breton, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and George Balanchine. A self-taught artist, Fini's work spans many mediums, including drawing, printmaking, costume design, and theatrical sets. As a painter, Fini is typically grouped with European surrealism, although she rejected what she considered the reductive labels of art movements. Nonetheless, Fini's work engages with the unconscious and includes fantastical scenes with jarring, other-worldly juxtapositions and symbolism. Unlike many surrealists, however, Fini engages deeply with the corporeality of the human body in a way that often subverts gender norms. Fini's female figures are typically dominant and stoic, while her male figures are eroticized. In other cases, the figures are highly androgynous and eroticized, complicating the way human sexuality is normally presented.

Described by many to be particularly tall and commanding in physical appearance with very unusual cat-like eyes, in many ways she was more creaturely than human. Taking the artistic interest in the motif of an animal/human hybrid somewhat literally, she stood as an embodiment of feline transformation and metamorphosis, and came to accurately identify herself with the ancient figure of a Sphinx. Deadly in Greek tradition, whilst benevolent but ferocious in Egyptian stories, the appearance of the mythical creature is symbolic of Fini's love for artifice and nature combined.

During her lifetime, Fini's work was regularly well received and moderately successful. She enjoyed inclusion in the 1936 landmark MOMA exhibition *Fantastic, Dada, Surrealism* and a show at the Julien Levy gallery in New York. More recently, her art has enjoyed considerably more attention as she undergoes a critical and scholarly re-

evaluation. She has been the subject of recent solo exhibitions at the Museum of Sex, New York (2018); the Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco (2008); the Bunkamura Museum of Art, Tokyo (2005); and the Revoltella Museum of Modern Art, Trieste, Italy (2009). Her work is represented in the permanent collections of museums worldwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Tate Modern, London, England; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France; and the Art Institute of Chicago, among others.

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