

Recognising Emma Jung's exploration of the unconscious



▲ Rebecca Ackroyd's "The world as I feel it" (2025) at the Cabaret Voltaire. Cedric Mussano. Courtesy of the artist.

The Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, birthplace of Dada, is dedicating an exhibition to Emma Jung. As early as 1911, the psychoanalyst and artist feared that she would be eclipsed by her famous husband. Over a century later, she is now being recognised.

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2025 marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) had long regarded him as his successor – until their dramatic falling out. Jung thought that Freud’s psychology was too fixated on sexuality, and in 1913, he broke away.

The split would probably have happened even without a dispute about psychoanalysis because of Jung’s anti-Semitic views and his **cosying up to the Nazis**. He was keen to secure his place in what he saw as the German-speaking world of the future – in opposition to Freud’s psychoanalysis, which he labelled “Jewish”.

In a 1918 essay titled *On the Unconscious*, Carl Jung wrote, “the Jew [...] is badly at a loss for that quality in man which roots him to the earth and draws new strength from below”. Jung added that this turning away from one’s inner nature could be seen elsewhere, resurfacing “in faked, distorted form, for instance as a tango epidemic, as Futurism, Dadaism, and all the other crazes and crudities in which our age abounds”.

The **Cabaret Voltaire**, the birthplace of Dada in Zurich, is now inviting visitors to discover the art of Emma Jung (1882-1955).

“I was shocked when I realised that Carl Jung’s wife, Emma Jung, was herself a psychoanalyst and did much the same kind of work as her husband – and that I’d never heard of her,” says Salome Hohl, director of the Cabaret Voltaire and curator of the exhibition on Emma Jung and her work. Hohl does not want to lump Emma Jung into the same ideological category as her husband: nothing is known of Emma Jung having had anti-Semitic views.



▲ Emma Jung's "Mädchen mit blauem Kleid" (Girl in blue dress), undated. © 2007 Stiftung der Werke von C.G. Jung, Zürich

Jung at Cabaret Voltaire

Although Carl Jung scornfully rejected the avant-garde, there were still some loose connections between Emma and Carl and Dada around 1918. Two Hopi figures owned by the Jungs, for example, inspired the Swiss Dada artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp. The exhibition at Cabaret Voltaire follows these subtle connections, with a focus on Emma Jung's drawings and paintings.

"We have heard a lot about the people in Carl Jung's social and professional circle – even his lovers, but hardly anything about his wife," Hohl says.

At Cabaret Voltaire, Emma Jung's newly discovered art is paired with works by contemporary artist Rebecca Ackroyd, whose beeswax sculptures shape the exhibition. At first glance, they are reminiscent of blind observers with covered eyes. On closer inspection, they appear far more ordinary.

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Ackroyd's figures are wearing diving goggles: they are swimmers and divers into the unconscious. From behind you can see that saw blades and goat skulls are hiding in their cavities. The British artist, fascinated by dreams and visions of the deep sea within us, even began Jungian dream therapy while preparing the show. She also produced small-format paintings, echoing Emma Jung's work and entering into dialogue with it.

Hohl notes that in recent years, greater attention has turned to women working outside conventional art circles who create visionary imagery as part of their healing processes or spiritual quests. She cites Swiss artist [Emma Kunz](#), who saw herself as a healer, and Dutch mystic [Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn](#), who exchanged ideas with Carl Jung and captured her visions on paper in Ticino.

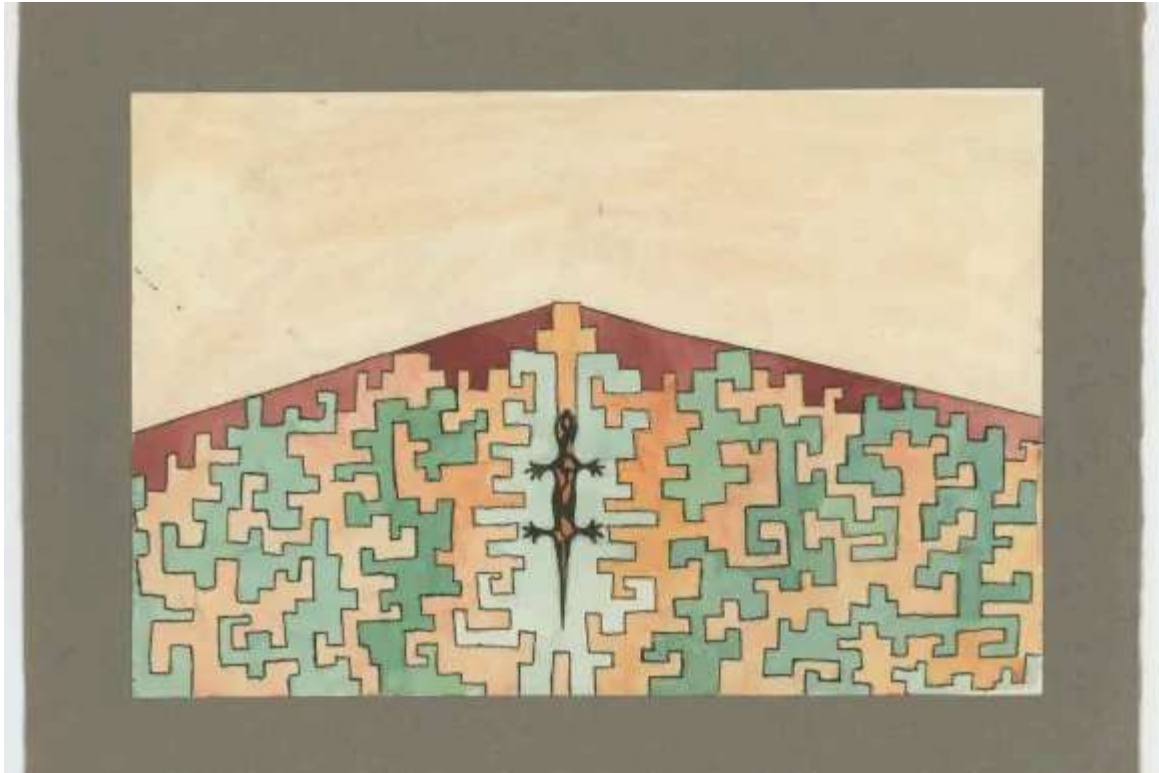
Working on the self

Starting in 1910, Emma Jung translated her dreams into carefully crafted, small-format paintings. "These are deeply personal works that were probably not intended for the public," Hohl says.

Jung employed a technique that her husband later defined as "active imagination", in which one engages with dreams and fantasies using art, thus establishing an [active exchange](#) with the subconscious. In doing so, a practitioner directly confronts psychological challenges.

One image that Emma Jung created using this approach depicts a lizard moving through a bewildering labyrinth. "The lizard can be

interpreted as a symbol of an ability to survive and to adapt. At the centre of all her work is individuation – the attempt to become oneself and to draw unconscious elements into awareness. For her, this also meant carving out her own path as an intellectual woman beside a famous man,” Hohl says.



▲ Emma Jung's "Salamander und Kreuz" (Salamander and cross), undated.
Cabaret Voltaire

Emma Jung was born Emma Maria Rauschenbach in Schaffhausen, northeastern Switzerland, in 1882. Her father had taken over the International Watch Company (IWC), originally founded by an American watchmaker. After they married, Carl Jung also became a partner in the company. As the daughter of a wealthy industrialist family, Emma was able to get an education that gave her access to literature, philosophy and psychology – but university study was not allowed.

Even before they married, Emma Rauschenbach was conducting research and translating for Carl Jung. She spoke many more languages than he did. When they married in 1903, Emma became part of the research and practice group at the Burghölzli Psychiatric Clinic in Zurich and supported her husband in his

work. In 1911 she appeared in the group photo of the Psychoanalytic Congress, an indication that she was taken seriously as an analyst in her own right.



▲ The 1911 Psychoanalytic Congress: Emma Jung is sitting in the first row, the fifth place from the right. Cabaret Voltaire

In 1916 Emma Jung became the first female president of the Association for Analytical Psychology, which had been founded after the split from the Freudians. Yet apart from a few lectures, her own work remained largely hidden. She died in 1955 and her main work, a study on the symbolism of the Grail, was only published posthumously.

At the beginning of 2025, **Princeton University Press published a collection** introducing Emma Jung's work in English to an international audience. It includes her poems, plays and paintings.

The collection clearly shows that Emma Jung understood her art not simply as expressions of her own psyche but always as interwoven with myths from religion, art and literature.



▲ From left to right, Emma Jung's "Schutzmantelmadonna" (undated), "Kandelaber" (1917) and "Korallenbaum" (undated). Photo: Cedric Mussano. Courtesy: Familienarchiv Jung, © 2007 Stiftung der Werke von C.G. Jung, Zürich.

One example of this is the work *Coral Tree*, in which Emma worked through a dream using active imagination. In her notes, she describes diving into the deep sea where she saw a luminous coral tree. A voice instructed her to pluck a flower from the tree, but a fish-man, lord of these waters and guardian of the tree, scolded her and demanded she justify her theft. Jung was not concerned with what this dream might say about herself but with its connection to mythic figures such as the Babylonian Oannes, a fish-creature said to have brought writing to humankind.

Several of Emma Jung's pictures are clearly marked by destruction and upheaval. Some drawings show expressions of the First World War. The Jungs' work is also an expression of this phase of upheaval, when diverse groups in exile were in Zurich, including the artists of the Dada movement, seeking transformation in a collapsing world.

Hohl explains where the parallels to Dada lie. "The Jungs tried to counter despair and fear with creativity and find strategies which

externalised what was hidden. They asked how to face the fact that the individual is not driven solely by reason – and how leaving the unspoken and unaddressed within the individual can lead to political catastrophes. Seeing creativity as therapy was a key parallel with Dada.”

As early as 1911, Emma Jung corresponded with Sigmund Freud, who encouraged her at the time. “From time to time I struggle with how I can assert myself next to Carl. I find that I have no friends, and that all the people who socialise with us really only want to be with Carl, apart from a few boring people whom I find completely uninteresting. The women are, of course, all in love with him, and with the men I am anyway immediately shut out as just the wife of their mentor or their friend,” she wrote.

Emma Jung’s work would remain overshadowed for more than a century before finally gaining recognition.

Edited by Benjamin von Wyl. Adapted from German by David Kelso Kaufher/ts



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