

Illusions and beyond in the work of surrealist artist Unica Zürn.

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From being “la femme” and the muse of her more famous partner Hans Bellmer, surrealist artist Unica Zürn (1916-1970) has been increasingly studied and acknowledged for her originality and highly personal style. Her most influential writings, the autofictional novels *Dark Spring* and *The Man of Jasmine*, were written parallel to struggling with severe depressions and psychotic breakdowns with hospitalizations – a struggle that ended with her suicide. While her drawings and paintings are fragmented and haunted by terrifying figures, these novels give a narrative of continuity and repetitions in the development of her illness. Childhood traumas were met by imaginary means of wishful fantasies and illusions of love, fantasies and illusions that continued to dominate her later love-life before they transformed into psychotic delusions. Zürn’s work actualizes questions of relations between trauma and imaginary work of fantasies and illusions. I will in this paper, on the background of Zürn’s work, discuss the tension between wishful fantasies and illusional beliefs as defensive acts towards overwhelming psychic states, and as genuine creative attempts to establish connections and meaning in relation to oneself and the external world.