Dance of the Nine Maidens, 1940
By Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988), UK

Transcription: What Colquhoun’s representation of magic means to Lucya Starza, a practising witch

I'm Lucya Starza. I'm a pagan, I'm a witch and I'm a Wiccan.

I think it's important to look beyond, beneath the surface of things. For example, here beneath the surface of the rock, there's a spirit of a woman or women. And I think an important part of witchcraft, of paganism, of magic is learning to look beyond and beneath the superficial. I see the image of a pregnant woman and her face is turned away, but she's in the process of being transformed into a megalith. There's movement in the picture. The woman is in the act of dancing. It seems as though she's holding hands with other figures. You can kind of see their legs and maybe their backs.

It's about balance and polarity to me, and I know it's part of the magical landscape of Cornwall that inspired the pictures. I know there are legends that many stone circles are supposedly women or girls turned to stone because they're out dancing on a Sunday instead of being in the church. And this picture feels, although the dance still goes on within the stones, it, it kind of hasn't stopped – it was preserved and could potentially come alive again. It's, it's, it's not so much that they were turned to stone, but that they became part of the stone. I, I mean, obviously, it's kind of a bit horrible, legends about people being, women being punished for doing something fun, like dancing. But I feel that the painting is kind of showing that whatever ill will was meant against the women, it didn't take away their power – their power’s preserved there and their energy can still be felt.

Also, as a, as a tarot reader, what I see within that picture is something quite similar to the world card in tarot. The interesting thing about the world card is that it's not necessarily a specific gender. And although the figure in that picture is very feminine, you also have the stone, which is kind of a bit phallic, a bit masculine, so you have a kind of gender fluidity within the picture, which you also get in the world card in tarot. So yes, it definitely resonates in terms of my practice. And I understand that Ithell Colquhoun, the artist, saw almost that the power of the feminine was more powerful than the masculine power, although they were both combined, but that together they were more powerful than either
on their own. And I also see that within the picture. So, I think that the way I perceive it is in keeping with the way that the artist intended it to be seen.