

NORMA OLIVER

There is little known about Norma Oliver (which appears to have been the pseudonym of Aurelia Zadory, about whom little is known, including her birth and death dates, which are believed to have been 1893 and 1979, respectively), was the adopted daughter of Helen Butler Wells. As enthusiastic Spiritualists, they founded the Jansenists, a group whose members conducted séances, during which they claimed to have made contact with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Pythagoras, and Tecumseh, the 18th-century Shawnee chief, among other deceased historical figures. After the passing of Helen Butler Wells, Oliver channeled her as well.

Norma Oliver's most relevant production dates from the 1940's to the mid-1960's. While channeling a combination of Helen Wells and Eswald, the spirit guide of Wells, she created sixteen drawing books filled with geometric, medallion and floral designs, which represented the "spiritual portraits" of her Society's members. Often these drawings were created for loved ones to know what the departed looked like in spirit form. Oliver produced symmetrical, ornately patterned, sometimes mandala-like compositions, each one a portrait of someone from the beyond. Sometimes she paired them with photographs of their subjects. Ms. Oliver continued channeling for 16 years, when she too passed over to the spirit realm, leaving behind the volumes of drawings and lectures for posterity.

Selected Exhibitions:

- 2022: Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN
- 2021: Photo Brut: Collection Bruno Decharme & Compagnie, American Folk Art Museum, New York, NY
- 2018: Duende, Cavin-Morris Gallery, New York, NY