

ClitKong #2 Witches

Powerful, subversive, marginalized

Consider the witch as a subversive, powerful and marginal figure that takes on various forms.

This issue is born to celebrate the emancipator potential of a complex figure who lives as an outcast, in a relation to the world that short-circuit conventional ways of knowledge, perception and action. The one who doesn't act like we want her to, who dare violate norms when she thinks it's right to do so, who hangs over profane darkness... and all women* judged «unwanted» who have been persecuted and are still stigmatized nowadays in our society, even tortured or killed, in countries like India, Ghana, Saudi Arabia...

How does this figure can be inspiring although she has been wrought to be a tool for domination? How can we avoid that tendency to reappropriate occult figures that crush the reality of past, present or future persons?

We're not saying that witches during the Inquisition were feminists, because it's difficult to prove that their lives were related to a conscious battle against patriarchy. By addressing the representation of the witch in a symbolic point of view, we want to highlight realities of women labelled as «witches»: those whose non-orthodox actions had an impact when religious and secular powers formed political authority. We want to be inspired by the courage of those who embrace ways of living and sensing the world that society reprobates, with respect for our otherness. Embrace integrity that allows us to resist normalisation (that process which skimps mind and possible singularities).

The picture of a supernatural monster – the most used to represent witches – is concealing the reality of those «disturbing» women*. To persecute them without any form of pity or indignation, the Church deprived witches of their humanity in the collective imagination by spreading etchings since the 16th century. This harsh heritage is all that is left from them because their history was written and archived by those who wanted to eradicate them, their knowledge and the possibility of an alternative to the dominant dogma.

Because occultism is making a huge comeback in cultural trends (illustration, fashion industry, tattoos, social networks...) to the point that its symbols are becoming meaningless. Because the witch figure is still trapped into centuries-old stereotypes: repellent and laughed at old lady / undressed young woman, sexually objectified / astride on a broom / bent over a cauldron. Tired of those images of consensual witches, we want to unassumingly invoke imaginative forces that exist out of those clichés.

With the following pictures (and some texts), we want to celebrate people whose actions are beyond our understanding, fierce erudites, healers, those who weave unconventional links, the restive ones, the weirdos, the disobedient ones, curious lucifers and instinctive ones listening to their inner rhythm, misunderstood, stigmatized, moody ones, those who don't fear having dirt under their fingernails...

We want to make this social, historical and folkloric figure a multi-faceted crystal through which everyone can see, define and imagine themselves. We want to build a corpus of pictures to return what have been taken to this transcendental status. We might risk to create new fantasized images but we try to infuse them with stimulant and liberating substance. We want to celebrate the complex archetype, its otherness, its actions and movement magnitude, its power, its independence, non-conformism, sensitivity, its mediation work between perceived worlds, its intimate regard for darkness and depths, its complicity with cosmos... And we don't mean to keep quiet about the unfair organized persecution suffered by thousands of «misfit» women* who, sometimes, didn't even have anything to do with witchcraft practices.

Besides her symbolic status, the witch has a pragmatical and contextual social reality at the beginning of the Inquisition in Europe and colonies: the witch owned lands claimed by clerks that denounced her; she didn't believe in dominant religion; she was the widow living alone or begging. She was the one who chose not to belong to a husband, the one who disobeyed her master or partner. The one who didn't please a priest, a neighbour, the one who knew too much, who refused favours from a notable, who didn't submit to authority, the stubborn slave, the colonized, obstetrician or abortionist who mastered nature forces, the one who liked being a hermit or living with animals, the one whose social or professional status made her influential to the people, the unstable or the one whose behaviour was judged unnatural or unconventional.

She's basically the one with a way of life and action threatening (symbolically or empirically) an established order: patriarchal hegemony.

Once upon a time

Although healers, sibyls or magicians have been in the social corps and myths for ages, the witch figure was created in Europe to name, tell apart and blame a targeted part of the population. It's a bastion «label» of the Inquisition's social repression. It's a «heretics» hunt made by misogynist clergymen to ensure their power by establishing distrust and popular discord based on fear. It happened during a major social crisis: the beginning of the slave trade, the extermination of Native Americans, the end of feudalism with vagrancy development, the expropriation of commons, inflation... that led to rural riots. Witches are scapegoats served to a frightened society so it projects its paranoid anguish. Any resemblance to current facts isn't purely coincidental. They're called dangerous by neurotic people, judging them deviant: most of the accused are women* from modest background. It didn't happen during the Middle Ages as is often believed (by then, they

could still pursue many jobs and benefit from recognized social status), but rather during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The term reappeared to categorize those who didn't submit to the dominant way of thinking. We are now returning this accusation to self-proclaim: We Are Witches!

Call for a different imagination linked with this archetype.

We are convinced that the witch's figure can bring us a rich thought thanks to her otherness, and that she needs to be claimed with her intricacy in order to benefit from her subversive potential, often ignored in trade-off pleasant popular clichés.

In simplistic representations, the witch has been reduced to horrific Halloween decorations or erotic subject matter made by many artists for centuries, creating a fantasized image to serve an ideology. Accusing of lechery was a pretext to create voyeuristic pictures and excuse the perversion of the "poor tempted man" (excuse used by inquisitors to commit the worst abuses on women, cf. the vast diversity of torture instruments invented to hurt female organs: Breast ripper, Pear of Anguish, impalement...). Through this binary iconography persists a weak, infertile witch culture and a lack of knowledge regarding this evocative figure, with strong and various models of behaviour. Erotic cliché allows to transform this powerful figure into a passive decoration made to please the heteronormative male gaze, even in beautifully arranged torture scenes. This pleasing ideal is far away from occult realities of some rebellious women with intricate practices. And far away from those awful "questioning sessions" (unbearably cruel tortures sometimes leading to a slow death or to the stake) reserved to so-called harmful women.

Yet, the historical and mystical figure of the witch holds a richness of evocations that can inspire us in our perception and our actions. Let's nurture it!

*persons perceived or identifying as women

** Recent researches show that between the 15th and the 18th centuries, the Church – helped by secular power – killed about 100 000 persons, 80 to 90% of whom were women. This does not include a more significant number of tortured women, up to 200 000 according to historian A.L. Barstow. A massive feminicide which is still the least studied phenomenon of the history of Europe.