

# DAZED

**Get witchy! How a new exhibition is invoking the supernatural**



*Alison Blicke. "Do More Thinking" (2020). Oil on canvas. 84 x 63 inches. Photography Joshua White Courtesy Alison Blicke*

ART & PHOTOGRAPHYFEATURE

**Featuring Ana Mendieta, Marilyn Minter, and more, enter a 'witchy' world of artists exploring power, the body, and gender through supernatural lenses**

6 March 2020 Gilda Bruno

## All of Them Witches



Inspired by “incantations, wishes, and curses”, a recently opened exhibition at Los Angeles’ gallery Jeffrey Deitch titled *All of Them Witches* retraces the history of the occult and its impact on the contemporary art practice.

Enacted during Henry VIII’s reign, *The Witchcraft Act of 1542* condemned witchcraft as a crime that could be punished by death. Back then, English monarchs thought that abolishing witchcraft would control the supernatural preventing the spread of antichristian beliefs. Across the centuries, witch cults and practises lost their spiritual credibility and begun to be regarded as meaningless tricks performed by “confidence men” or “con-artists”.

First accused, then downplayed as a skin game, witchcraft might have not been recognised as one of the factors shaping the pre-modern artistic production; but its tradition has undoubtedly survived until today, eventually serving as the cultural foundation of feminist empowerment.

While witchcraft is often seen as women’s territory, *All of Them Witches* features works from artists across the gender and non-binary spectrum whose art is thought to be characterised by a “witchy sensibility”. Combining painting, sculpture, videos, and photographs, the showcase turns the spotlight on personalities such as Ana Mendieta, Ariana Papademetropoulos, Lyle Ashton Harris, Marilyn Minter, and Breyer P-Orridge.

Below, we talk to Dan Nadel and Laurie Simmons, curators of the exhibition, about those who inspired the showcase, the supernatural, and its relevance for the contemporary art scenario.



*"The Scarlet Woman" (2020) Photography Joshua White Courtesy Ariana Papademetropoulos*

**The press release of *All of them Witches* reads ‘This exhibition arose from a conversation we’ve been having for years about our shared affinity for a certain kind of art to which we’re drawn, can’t quite name, but recognise when we see it.’ Can you expand on the conversations that led to the decision to do this exhibition?**

Dan Nadel and Laurie Simmons: I would say that Laurie sparked it by showing me some works by women of her generation in the New York of the late 1970s-1980s. Because of my interest in romance comics and line-based fantasy drawing, artists such as Austè and [Deborah Turbeville](#) were new and particularly inspiring to me. Another key inspiration was the work of Renate Druks, a Malibu-based surrealist that emerged in the 1960s. After looking at the artistic production of numerous female artists, Laurie and I started to focus on a certain kind of imagery, linework, and ideas that had progressively been put out there by women. The exhibition began to take shape as we dived deeper into the creative visions of different artists.

**What forms does witchcraft present itself within the show?**

Dan Nadel and Laurie Simmons: It's a wide spectrum. On the one end of the spectrum, there's Trulee Hall's 'The Seance of Umbilical Coven', which is perhaps the most explicit reference to witchcraft among the ones featured in the showcase. The artwork is a masterpiece of a witch-hut, including a fantastic video of the coven itself; on the other end, there is 'No title', a small minimalist sculpture of a witch hat by artist Robert Therrien. In the former, we see the occult as an active, engaged entity expressing itself in the present-day gathering of a coven, whereas the latter serves as a memorial to the pop-culture reduction of witches – the witch hat.

**Can you tell us more about what defines a 'witchy' sensibility?**

Dan Nadel and Laurie Simmons: The show is all about artists, mostly figurative, but not exclusively, who use supernatural, sexual, and strong imagery in a non-ironic, historically astute manner. The works on display allude to, depict, or examine gendered identity, power, and contrasting depictions of feminist power.



*"Woman's Psyche" (1968) Photography Joshua White Courtesy Juanita McNeely*

**Why do you think artists are so drawn to working with the occult, the supernatural, and this 'witchy' sensibility?**

Dan Nadel and Laurie Simmons: We believe that once a certain category has been dismissed as 'camp', this gives artists the opportunity to work on taking new risks and unexplored challenges. There's room to work unencumbered by a body of critical literature. In many ways, the occult is a great, under-explored area through which to express ideas that are risky or, otherwise, off-putting. But we mostly think that these are symbols that embolden artists offering them a way forward into agency.

**What relevance does the exhibition have for today's evolving conceptions of gender and identity?**

Dan Nadel and Laurie Simmons: We hope *All of Them Witches* will reflect the current expanding conversations around the themes of gender and identity, not only in terms of who the artists on display are; but also in the manifold depictions of sex, bodies, ageing, and transformation that characterise the show itself.

**What do you hope people take from this show?**

Dan Nadel and Laurie Simmons: Ideally, we would like viewers to discover lots of artists they may have not been familiar with and understand how generative the abstract concept of witchcraft can be.

*All of Them Witches is open at 925 North Orange Drive, Los Angeles until April 11*