

Changing Faces of Witches in Contemporary Photography

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Abstract: In photography, the image of witchcraft has always been associated with the quality of being different, due to the necessity of representing the inexplicable or the strange. Very rarely in the history of images the owners of paranormal powers have been presented as being immersed in banality. However, nowadays, photographers treat as well this aspect, but the image of witches is, by excellence, associated with an extravagant physical aspect. The means to do this are very different: the body, the outfit, the expression, the scenography of the environment where the witch is being represented shall take the attributes of an extravagance which underlines her/his qualities as out of the common, which also imply the idea of isolation and the glamour of a varied display of explicit powers. The new witches that some photographers depict nowadays seem born out of a desire for an anticapitalistic life, out of the system, as in the Wicca movement, for instance. In this paper, a focus is put on the aesthetic ways of presenting the image of the witch in photography, depending on the specific period of time artists refer to in their works.

Keywords: witchcraft, photography, aesthetics, icon, magic, history of images.

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Witchcraft stories belong generally to the narrative of the supernatural manifested in the ordinary daily world of humans. The mysterious looks of the witches and wizards have been described in an endless number of representations. From the oral description to the written one, from drawing and painting to photography and film, the image of the witch was the subject of an infinite variety of perspectives. In some of these phantasmatic images, we can see the body of the witches, in some we can only perceive the traces of their passing and magical actions. In the history of images, the witches appear to embody beings that belong to our world and to the other one, to (at least) two dimensions of life. They have the power of gathering the seen and the unseen, as well as the power to show themselves in intelligible forms, stay hidden behind strange happenings or disappear from the visible sphere. The way in which they can be perceived by the human eye is a matter of controversy in the history of images. In the introduction to *The History of the Body*, Georges Vigarello states:

The modern era doesn't make an exception to the rule that the conscience about the body cannot be separated in any society from the imaginary of life and from the vision upon the world.¹

If any representation of the body is inseparable from the imagined vision of the surrounding world, the physical image of the witch is necessarily related to the same aspect. The first images of witches in film and photography were heavily influenced by the traditional representations, such as women dressed in black, wearing pointed hats and flying on brooms. The Swedish-Danish documentary film *Häxan* (1920), based on Benjamin Christensen's study of *Malleus Maleficarum*, is an early cinematic vibrant example of the ways of seeing the witches in previous times, which had led to the horrors of past hunts. This kind of representations became iconic in the history of images and it is still viral in contemporary filmmaking and photography. But the ensemble of circulating images has evolved during the 20th century to forms that are more refined and encrypted in many workstyles within the

¹ Jacques Gélis, "Corpul, Biserica și sacrul," in *Istoria corpului I*, ed. Alain Courbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Georges Vigarello, trans. Simona Manolache, Gina Puică, Muguraș Constantinescu, Giuliano Sfichi (Bucharest: Art, 2008), 19.

field of visual arts. If ancient guides for inquisitors hunting for witches had engendered a whole display of imaginary dark representations, the evolution of ideas has uncovered new witch icons which are situated far from the traditional common places.

At the encounter of past and present cultural conceptions, the definition of the witch has been suffering a series of mutations that are still producing changes in the ways of seeing this volatile character. The monstrous faces and the horror-like behaviours of the witches that had justified abuse and punishment all over history have been slowly replaced, during the 20th century, by other kinds of portraiture and associations, in the attempt to escape old stereotypes of perception and resulting prejudices.

If the image of the black witch has always been a powerful icon, photographers nowadays are in the search of new faces of people related to magic and spells. In the classical approach, the appearance of the dark witch is frequently associated with death. The black cape or the rags that often cover her body are very similar to the traditional clothing that was attributed to the very strong character of death. The two icons may be sometimes mistaken one for another. In recent photography, these images are still being given great importance, even if new interpretations displace some of their ancient connotations.

The concern for the funereal imaginary, fervent in the Victorian age and the beginning of the 20th century, made photographers focus on the world of those who are not among the living anymore, but also on these ones' manifestations after the end of their physical existence. The dead have been therefore depicted under two aspects: a material one, where they can be seen shortly after passing away, and an immaterial one, which opens the doors of perception towards the inexplicable phenomena that accompany their apparition as spirits. Of course, the belief in the world from beyond is ancestral, but the apparition of the photographic camera had a deep influence for the collective imaginary. From post-mortem photography to spirit and paranormal phenomena photography, the production of images dedicated to death raised the curiosity, fascination, repulsion and the obsession of the beholders. At the same time, this brought major changes in visual arts' aesthetics. The encounter with death in photography, far from leaving the public indifferent, led to the emergence of a visual appetite without precedent for the macabre and for the fantastic. Important cultural mutations took place in proportion as photographers

revealed, through their art, the crossing between the worlds. In his book *Le spiritisme*, Jacques Lantier raises the problem of the relativity of the sensitive level:

Does our sensitive universe not make the object of a collective hallucination? It is far away, in any case, from what our senses perceive from the material reality. We see things that exist only for us, at our scale.²

Those things, that we only see, can therefore exist or not exist. Lantier doesn't cast only the shadow of doubt upon visual perception, but he attests two categories of things that we can see: collectively or individually. It is interesting that the first one doesn't include the existence of the other one, and the reality of the individual, the subjective area, has the same status as the one being considered objective. Photography comes to reunite these two worlds of perception, due to its quality of being a technical document, whose authenticity is easy to prove with scientific methods and hence imposes itself as unquestionable. There were although moments of hesitation in the reception of the photography of the paranormal and the investigations which came up soon led to disappointing conclusions such as technical fraud discoveries or to real surprises when the fake could not be proved. By referring to the common matter of archaic humanity, Lantier eliminates the possibility of knowledge of infinite and eternal notions, applying the simple distinction at the level of primitive man's perception:

The earth is the place of two different worlds: the visible and the invisible, whose limit is marked by death. The living are visible; death makes them invisible. There are therefore two parts in the living: the visible that disappears and the invisible that subsists.³

By structuring the world according to what can be seen confers the images the quality of being a proof of the existence of things: if we can see them, they exist, and if not, they don't. In this way, at the time photography begins to show us what we cannot see, the cultural categories are certainly being disordered and the faith in the world from beyond and in the intense activity of its inhabitants

² Jacques Lantier, *Le Spiritisme ou l'aventure d'une croyance* (Paris : Grasset, 1971), 156.

³ Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 157.

can reach the absolute of a truth. After tracing this limit, Lantier brings into discussion the forms of referring to what is invisible, which, due to this quality, can become a dangerous thing that imposes assuming some precautions. The invisible world is an unknown territory, as complex as the visible world, where both positive and gloomy events can take place:

After death, the invisible people lead an existence identical to the one they led when they were alive; their nature doesn't change. An evil man stays evil; a criminal continues his bad deeds; a witch doesn't stop doing harm etc.⁴

One of the negative examples of Lantier's list of invisible people who don't stop causing trouble is the witch (or the wizard). His statement casts a dark shadow over this image, as he refers to the evil nature of the witch. It is interesting though that he puts it together with that of common people, but in the negative line; the black witch continues to cast bad spells even after death.

The ways of illustrating the witch in photography are then related to the tradition according to which this figure has always a malefic potential. Its relationship with other spirits is as well considered to be an undoubtful reality. This is a reason for which a great number of uncanny photographs depicting witches have traits in common with early spirit photography, where unseen faces show up out of nowhere, under the shape of foggy floating portraits or even of strange ectoplasms coming out of a medium's body. In the 19th century, in William Hope's work, we can see many of these apparitions as translucent and blurry, posing together with living people. The physical dimensions of these spectral posers often variate and usually cannot be seen entirely. Even if Hope was found guilty of faking these images by substituting the plates he used in photographic sessions, his spirit portraits still represent a powerful source of inspiration even for contemporary photographers and film directors.

As well as the medium that often appear in old spirit photography, the witch is believed to be able to make the connection between the worlds and therefore associated with the imagined spirits and even with a great variety of demons or fairy tale creatures. In staged photography and/or in its post-processing phase, everything becomes possible.

⁴ Lantier, *Le Spiritisme*, 157.

Surrealist photography shows us multiples modes of interaction between the visible and the invisible, and their relations have not always been cordial. The complexity of the proximity of the two worlds, as well as the raids on enemy territory have been creating a sea of visual stories, from objects' levitation and the emergence of ectoplasms to the haunting, under various forms and strategies, of places by spirits or to the accomplishment of miracles and magic, in other contexts. First illustrated in photography, these imagined situations have later nourished the narrative genius of cinema, creating real cults for film genres like horror, film noir or mystery film, fantasy and sci-fi. At the present time, we are witnessing an abundant explosion of such cinematic productions, thanks to the very advanced technology, that enchant entire cinemas full of fans. The dark and scary image of the witch is still very present in many visual productions, but at the same time is being slowly replaced by other avatars.

In Silvia Federici's book *Caliban and the Witch*, the deep connections between the witch's status and the evolution of capitalist accumulation through the sexual and economic exploitation on women are brought to light in what has the pretention to be a detailed sociologic analysis.⁵ The use that patriarchal societies have made of the dark aspect of women related to sorcery is revealed as one of the most powerful tools of oppression and enslavement.

The most important historical question addressed by the book is how to account for the execution of hundreds of thousands of "witches" at the beginning of the modern era, and how to explain why the rise of capitalism was coeval with a war against women.⁶

Federici revisits Marx and Foucault's theories from the point of view of women's history, searching for the answer to an imposing question:

⁵ It should be noted here that Federici was badly and justly criticized even inside Marxist and leftist intellectual circles, for her lack of scientific information, for the "manipulation of iconography" and for the weakness of her methodology: Yann Kindo, "Caliban et la sorcière, ou l'Histoire au bûcher (1/2)," <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/yann-kindo/blog/101217/caliban-et-la-sorciere-ou-l-histoire-au-bucher-12-0> (accessed February 2020), Christophe Darmangeat, "Caliban et la sorcière (Silvia Federici), ou l'Histoire au bûcher – 2/2", <http://cdarmangeat.blogspot.com/2017/12/caliban-et-la-sorciere-silvia-federici.html> (accessed February 2020).

⁶ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2009), 14.

Why, after 500 years of capital's rule, at the beginning of the third millennium, are workers on a mass scale defined as paupers, witches, and outlaws? How are land expropriation and mass pauperization related to the continuing attack on women? And what do we learn about capitalist development, past and present, once we examine it through the vantage-point of a feminist perspective?⁷

The fact that we are not anymore an idolatrizing society can be seen in contemporary photography which tends to illustrate witches or other figures who have profound connections to other worlds. Artists are nowadays demystifying the image of the malefic sorcerer and tend to reframe it in the common reality. Sometimes they approach the witch's representation as an ordinary one, far from magic and fantasy. The feared character of the witch is being replaced, in the works of many photographers, by the face and body of common people, which integrate various ritual practices into their everyday life. It can also be a matter of fashion, as we can see by reviewing a huge mass of thematic festivals and specific publications for witchcraft fans.

The contemporary appetite for magic practices regards both aesthetics and ethical codes of behaviour, as we can discover in new magazines, such as *Sabat Magazine*, which "fuses Witchcraft and feminism, ancient archetypes and instant art." On this publication's website, we can discover various definitions of what actually means to be a witch, as a reading key, between fashion and personal statements, as for example:

A Witch is somebody who stands against patriarchy and everything that is currently wrong with our society and any society throughout the ages. (April Graham)

Witch is an identity. It is an individual who has embraced their connection with the Earth and with the Goddess. (Fay Nowitz)

A Witch is a person who takes responsibility for her own transformation through acts of creativity, ritual, and focused intention. She speaks the language of symbols and lives in liminal space. (Pam Grossman)

Magic is the very essence of it all. It's spirit, the life force, that creative, inexplicable power which we all possess and seek to express in the world.

⁷ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 11-12.

How well we manage to do that is a totally individual matter. (Lucius Mattheisen)⁸

The image of the witch, as well as its given possible definitions, is a fluctuating one: on different covers of the magazine, portraits can depict the mother, the maiden, the crone and other feminine forms of appearance, but necessarily in connection with witchcraft. The consequence is that these images don't belong to the same aesthetic register; they are sometimes dark, sometimes angelic, but connected to beauty and mystery and charm. The magazine uses only black and white photographs, which impregnate a classic dark fashion style and a film noir atmosphere to every image. Here and there, this aesthetics can be associated with Jean-Loup Sieff's, Helmut Newton's and other famous fashion photographer's work, by depicting seductive dangerous women. At the same time, it is far from using the image of women as object of desire like in the works mentioned above, for the reason that it is based on a feminist approach, more likely to revive Claude Cahun's work before World War II, one of the first photographic approaches of the feminine sexual liberation. The French artist's self-portraits undermined the traditional gender roles by illustrating a series of different avatars of herself. A similar way of working with the self was made famous by Cindy Sherman's series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980). These images represent also a permanent visitation of the self in imagined stills from inexistent *film noir* B category movies from the '50s. Sherman is posing every time in a different character, sometimes easily to associate to famous actresses like Sophia Loren or to Hitchcock aesthetics of the female protagonists, at the border of fear and hysteria. But in her work, the American photographer is not presenting the strong side of the women she attempts to illustrate, if not weak avatars of women seen as prey in scary environments and situations.

Sabat Magazine is presenting women as powerful and their magic side is designed to attract and enthrall the viewer, in a romantic vein which is susceptible to revive old legends and myths on the witches' powers. The above-mentioned definitions put the image of the sorcerer in connection to the identity quest and discovery of the self in the light of ritual practices and

⁸ <http://www.sabatmagazine.com/about> (accessed February 2020).

creative use of mystic knowledge. In extension to personal development, the image of the witch promoted by the publication is politically engaged in the fight against the patriarchal system of rules that still dominate the society. Feminist by statement, *Sabat Magazine* is promoting photographs that suggest a mysterious black and white universe hidden beyond the present grey reality. The pictures used to illustrate the woman's avatars are nevertheless still bound to powerful icons in the history of images. For example, the cover of *The Mother Issue* presents to the public a sort of black Madonna underlined by heavily strong dark shades, while *The Crone Issue*, suggests the appearance of a saint figure or pure deity in a lighter composition with white veil and grapes. The look in the models' eyes has a strange focus, as if they are subject to a trance where they can see beyond appearances.

These kinds of new witches are being themselves the subject of continuous transformations, dictated by either artistic or commercial purposes. An interesting case of photographic illustration of witchy people is the Romanian photographer Ioana Cîrlig's series *Zâne* (*Fairies*), which follows real persons who live in isolated or very peripheral places in Romania and who can be perceived as being magic for the reason they don't really belong to society, but they exist in in-between zones of uncertain social and economic status, like mountains and forests where common people usually never set foot. Cîrlig's Fairies are both women, men, even children and they are portrayed in their simple but harsh surroundings, at the limit of the civilized world. The photographs are realistic and the series' style is simple, documentary. Fiction is not present at all, even if the title suggests another world.

In a different manner, in my photographic work, I mixed a reality based story and fictive characters in order to illustrate the spirit of the abandoned houses in Roșia Montană, during the gold war, consisting in the attempts of RMGC (Roșia Montană Gold Corporation) to convince the locals to leave their houses and begin the gold exploitation.⁹ Nowadays, the houses people fled from are in ruin and very few people still inhabit the village. My series puts these two elements together in order to build an archive of this

⁹ On this gold war and its cultural and artistic consequences, see Ioan Pop-Curșeu, "Can Art (Re)Build a Community? The Roșia Montană Case, between Past and Future," *Caietele Echinox*, vol. 32, nr. 1 (2017): 159-173, DOI: 10.24193/cechinox.2017.32.13.

vanishing patrimony and at the same time tell the local stories of the spirits still protecting or haunting the abandoned places.¹⁰ One of the photographs was the cover image of the International Conference *Images of Witchcraft. Cinema, Theatre, Visual Arts* (Cluj, 15-17 October 2019).

The image I attempted to create in this series is based on the existing scenery set and the immersion of fantastic staged elements and figures that inhabit these abandoned places and still protect their vanishing human value. In the future, the village may become a UNESCO piece of patrimony. At present time, I am still documenting the traces of local history and its everlasting relation to the rush for gold, including real facts, local legends and anecdotes and memories concerning this subject, by creating a surrealist and at the same time realist image of a place which will possibly be lost forever.



Figure 1. Daria Ioan, *The lost Spirits* project, Roșia Montană, 2019.

¹⁰ The best repertory of fantastic stories (witches, spirits, demons) from Roșia Montană can be found in Ileana Benga, *Povestirile Roșiei Montane* (Târgu Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2011).



Figure 2. Daria Ioan, *The lost Spirits* project, Roșia Montană, 2019.



Figure 3. Daria Ioan, *The lost Spirits* project, Roșia Montană, 2019.



Figure 4. Daria Ioan, *The lost Spirits* project, Roșia Montană, 2019.

The interesting fact about this place that I am still documenting is that, after many locals fled to the city, some newcomers started moving to isolated houses in surrounding area of the village; most of them are concerned about healing plants and traditional medicine, so they are more likely to belong to the Wicca movement. This concept, also known as Pagan witchcraft, is considered to be both a modern Pagan religious movement and a part of the occultist stream of Western esotericism. It was developed in England during the first half of the 20th century and is typically duo-theistic, worshipping a Goddess and a God. Wiccan celebrations encompass both the cycles of the Moon, named with an ancient French word *Esbats* and commonly associated with the Goddess (female deity), and the cycles of The Sun, seasonally based festivals known as *Sabbats* and commonly associated with the Horned God (male deity).

The new Wicca witches and wizards are generally perceived as beneficial persons who fight for the conservation and revival of the healing traditions, in strong connection to nature and its gifts, of the renewal and acknowledgement of the bounds with the mysterious universe. On the other side, they are also

engaged in the denial of the capitalist values, leading a simple and modest life out of the order of consumerism. This is why being a witch in the contemporary world has predominantly positive connotations and has even become very fashionable.

In photography, the new witches are portrayed in various manners, which all tend to cast a good light on them. Their visual occurrences are far from the dark image of the classic malefic witch, with all its avatars. Nevertheless, some traits are being kept. First of all, difference and extravagance have always been attributes of the witch. Very rarely in the history of images the owners of paranormal powers have been presented as being immersed in banality. However, nowadays, photographers treat as well this aspect, but the image of witches is, by excellence, associated with an extravagant physical aspect. The image of witchcraft has always been associated with the quality of being different, due to the necessity of representing the inexplicable or the strange. The means to do this are very different: the body, the outfit, the expression, the scenography of the environment where the witch is being represented shall take the attributes of an extravagance which underlines her/his qualities as out of the common.

One of the most outstanding photographer artists who have treated and are still concerned about this subject is the Spanish Bego Anton. Until today, she created two different series which present the paranormal side of the new witches: *All of Them Witches* project (2017- ongoing) and *The Earth is only a little Dust under our Feet* (2018). In the first one, she is presenting situations that evoke the past mistreatment of the witches. The characters are mostly portrayed in natural outdoor settings, which are timeless backgrounds that allow the free imaginary flow between past and present. One image of the series reveals a beautiful young woman hanged by a tree and surrounded by a pack of white sheep. Its symbolic side is easy to interpret, as white and sheep have always been associated with purity and innocence. These elements are recurrent in Anton's work, where the suggestion of sacrifice is needed. In this composition, the face of the witch is impossible to identify, because of the quite long distance between the camera and the subject. The entire series presents women who are impossible to recognize due to various techniques: the distance, the focus, the long exposure and movement, the position etc. One of the most picturesque

images reveals to the viewer a group of colourfully dressed women dancing vividly around a big tree in the middle of a forest. The long exposure time and the wild celebrating dance produce the blurry effect that confers poetic effects and great plastic value to the still. At the same time, the artist states that through her photographs, she is telling real stories that happened in the Basque Country, aiming to demystify former persecutors' accusations, precisely by illustrating their absurdity:

I started this project from a personal necessity to demystify and raise the story of these women who were unfairly persecuted. I have researched the original documents written by the Spanish inquisitors where names and evidence is given, recreating those very concrete situations. They were accused of infanticide and then of eating those children in feasts full of filthy food, destroying harvests, causing storms, taking part in disgraceful orgies where everyone had sex with everyone (even with the Devil), making ointments with dead animals and plants to kill others or even having a personal toad that helped them metamorphose into any other animal and fly from the Basque Country to Terranova in the blink of an eye.¹¹

This series is built not only of portraits and situations where the witches are caught in action, but also of details of objects used in performing rituals, such as: animal and human dead bodies and intestines, flowers, knives, fruits, etc. The grotesque aspect of the corpses creates tension and adds to the pictures a shocking perspective, difficult to ignore.

Bego Anton's next series on witches, *The Earth is only a little Dust under our Feet* (2018), presents the beauty and strangeness of the supernatural in Iceland, where elves, fairies, witches and humans communicate in tranquillity and where all the exchanges are more likely to be explained by real interviews than shown in the photographs. Most of the protagonists of this series have traits that can be easily associated with the Wicca movement aesthetics: beautiful women of all ages with long dishevelled hair, dressed like middle age imagined maids or fairies, wearing stones or feathers and other objects used in rituals. Sometimes strange colours and light flares are introduced in

¹¹ Bego Anton, *All of them Witches*, 2017, <https://phmuseum.com/begoanton/story/all-of-them-witches>.

the compositions, as to suggest the presence of the supernatural. But Anton is showing us also a contemporary everyday image of people in connection with the sacred. Generally, the compositions are set in wilderness (into the woods or Icelandic desert landscape) in different seasons of the year. The portraits are accompanied by personal real stories and they can be followed by simple landscapes of places where extraordinary things have been happening or post-processed images that testify magic deeds, as for instance the lamb with two heads by night time, a shocking figure of the series. One of the most astonishing stories is that of a woman telling the anecdote of elf in love with Elvis Presley, as Bego Anton explains in the text of the series on her web page in 2018:

Saenun has hidden people as neighbours and seeing them is a gift that only the women in her family possess. Elves constantly borrow things from the farmhouse and won't return them until they no longer need them. I asked Saenun what the weirdest thing was that elves had taken, and she showed me an old VHS tape of the movie *Roustabout* starring Elvis Presley. "The elves must have loved it because they kept it for years," she said.¹²

For photographers nowadays, it is a common working method to combine photographs with explicative texts and fragments of interviews. At the border of artistic and documentary photography, these reportages document themes and situations by mixing real information with images which can be staged or not and giving weight to the whole concept. This style of visual storytelling is specific to Western and Northern Europe photography schools, and less in Eastern Europe, where the need for realistic pictures is generally held as more important.

Another photographer who treated the subject of the magic is the Polish Marta Berens. In her series, *Fairytale* (2015), she illustrates an alternative reality, where illusion is supposed to become truth in the visual imaginary world of childhood. Her photographs are populated by wild animals of the forest which are supposed to share a magic universe with children, strange lights and

¹² Bego Anton, <https://begoanton.com/the-earth-is-only-a-little-dust-under-our-feet/>.

blurry effects. The idea that Berens had was that of intentionally building the image of a supernatural environment that surrounds children. Her images are surrealistic only by the given connotations.

In Eastern Europe, witches are generally associated with Roma women who can read the future or the past and who are able to cast spells and curses or neutralize them.¹³ Their image has not changed a lot with the passing of time, as their outfit and their attitude have always been quite constant, maintaining a love and hate relationship to society. Strongly sexualized and mythicized during history, the Roma witches of the East are being very active at the present moment and their powers are recognized as undisputable gifts. In the last two decades, many photographers have approached their opulent and glamorous way of life and their extravagant activities. Such is the case of the Slovakian Lucia Sekerková, who recently documented in an anesthetizing and though realistic manner the luxurious universe of the Romanian witches. Her project, combined with an ethnographic study, was ongoing for 7 years and its purpose was that of showing the astonishing prosperity of the witchcraft business and the resulting wealth and glamorous lifestyle of these women. Sekerková noticed that the image of the Roma witch is full of stereotypes and psychological common places, but her series is a selection of surprising and intriguing hypostases, as for example the spontaneous and natural connection to the online media, which represents nowadays a smashing aspect of the witchcraft affair. The Roma sorcerers are consequently presented at work, looking for plants with magic powers, telling the future, fighting curses, blessing people or putting online selfies and videos of the rituals they perform. This exotic and esoteric world is not embellished by the photographer. The value of the series consists of the intimate character of the illustrated situations and of the free visual access to all the mysterious tools used in the witches' practices. Animal sacrifices partially revealed in the pictures are also an intriguing element of the series. The protagonists are being portrayed as well during daytime as during nighttime. Sekerková sometimes uses flash light and the resulting plastic effect is that of strong shining of the presented figure, which in this context is at the

¹³ Ioan Pop-Curșeu, "The Gypsy-Witch: Social-Cultural Representations, Fascination and Fears," *Revista de Etnografie și Folclor / Journal of Ethnography and Folklore*, New Series, no. 1-2 (2014): 23-45.

border of kitsch and art. Some other times, she creates chiaroscuro lighting sets to underline the traits of the imposing characters. The queen-like image of the Roma witches is visually based on the rich details of their opulent homes but also on fancy traditional clothes and valuable jewellery that they often wear to impress and to show the importance of their status, as for instance golden crowns, bracelets and impressive chokers. Another frequently used element of these compositions is the artificial pose of the sorcerers but the photographer alternates this type of portraits with casual ones, giving a natural fluidity to her visual storytelling.

Many other contemporary photographers have approached the mystic society of the Eastern Europe Roma witches and all the resulting works reveal a universe that is definitely out of the common and that communicates in strange ways with the everyday reality. In the United States, sorcerer images also appear in the visual media, as for example in *The New Yorker* or *The New York Times*.

In *The Many Faces of Women who identify as Witches* (2018), the photographer Naomi Fry searched for the identity aspects of women who consider themselves to have supernatural powers. The style in which they are presented is quite realistic but also slightly staged, similar to fashion magazines' pictorials. In contrast to the Eastern Europe witches, the American ones are not visually connected by traditional traits of their outfits, but they appear as individually built constructs, mixing fashion and witchcraft items from all over the ancient and modern world. The scenography in which their images are captured vary from urban to nature landscape, in no contradiction to the purpose of the series. The images are accompanied by short pieces of talks and statements which offer a firmer ground to the series.

Nowadays in Western society the witch has no more reasons to hide away like in the old dark times. On the contrary, she is often summoned to show up or to show off for the pleasure of an interested audience whose curiosity and appetite for the occult is still raising. As a resulting effect, in visual arts, and especially in photography, the image of the witch was normalized and successfully popularized. Its glamour and shining are not due anymore only to isolation and mystery, but also to a continuously growing presence in all media, influencing lifestyles, ways of thinking and social behaviours.

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