

## Witchcraft Hysteria Performing witchcraft

University of California, Los Angeles und University of Basel

Deadline: Oct 1, 2018

Johanna Braun

### WITCHCRAFT HYSTERIA

Performing witchcraft in contemporary art and pop culture

We seem to be living in bewitched times. Witches are everywhere in pop culture, and we're also seeing victims of alleged "witch hunts" pop up all over the place, especially on Twitter and other social media. Pop-stars perform as witches: like Katy Perry in her performance at the 2014 Grammy awards, where she appeared in a cowl before a crystal ball, while later dancing with broomsticks as poles. Beyoncé's visual album "Lemonade" (2016) made several explicit references to the historical figure Marie Laveau and magical witchcraft rituals drawn from Yoruba traditions. Azealia Banks proclaimed in the same year on Twitter that she practiced "three years worth of brujería" (brujería, Spanish: witchcraft) and tweeted (while cleaning the blood-smeared room used for her animal sacrifices): "Real witches do real things." Marina Abramovic's performance piece "Spirit Cooking" (1996) was referenced in the amusing Pizzagate conspiracy theory of 2016, accusing Abramovic and the Hillary Clinton campaign of performing satanic rituals. Clinton and other influential women in politics, such as Nancy Pelosi and Maxine Waters, got called "wicked witches of the left" and Sarah Palin participated in a public ritual to secure her electoral win and "save her from witchcraft". More recently, thousands of people coordinate binding spells against political leaders (#bindtrump) and Silvia Federici's seminal book "Caliban and the Witch" (2004) moved from the bookshelf to the bedside table for many art professionals.

The title "Witchcraft Hysteria" is drawn from the inscription on the monument dedicated 1992 to the Salem Witch Trials (1692), that were informed by European-US-American witchcraft discourses of their time and in turn were highly influential on today's discussions.

For this publication, we want to investigate the revival and the current interest in the figure of the witch and the performance of witchcraft in contemporary art, visual culture and pop culture. The figure of the witch as icon of historical significance and present relevance in art and politics has steadily become more prominent, and has had widespread cultural impact. Our project focuses on performance strategies of "performing witchcraft" in a contemporary context, focusing on the last two decades.

Relevant paper topics may consider, but are not limited to:

- The figure of the witch in contemporary art and culture
- Contextualizing "Witchcraft Hysteria" in theater, film, television, music, streaming media, social media, etc. in both their historical representations and their contemporary or current manifesta-

tions

- Witchcraft (Hysteria) and performance studies
- Witchcraft and feminism in visual art (practice and expression)
- Practicing witchcraft as a form of political protest
- The politics of being (labeled) a witch
- Queer-feminist perspectives on witchcraft
- Intersectional questions of gender, class and/or race and witchcraft

Schedule

Proposals (500 words): October 1, 2018

Final Papers Due: January 16, 2019

Publication: Summer, 2019

Please submit a 500-word proposal and a 200-word biography to both editors: Johanna Braun (johannabraun@g.ucla.edu) and Katharina Brandl (katharina.brandl@unibas.ch) by October 1, 2018.

Katharina Brandl  
University of Basel

Johanna Braun  
Erwin Schrödinger Fellow, University of California, Los Angeles

Reference:

CFP: Witchcraft Hysteria Performing witchcraft. In: ArtHist.net, Sep 18, 2018 (accessed Apr 22, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/18975>>.