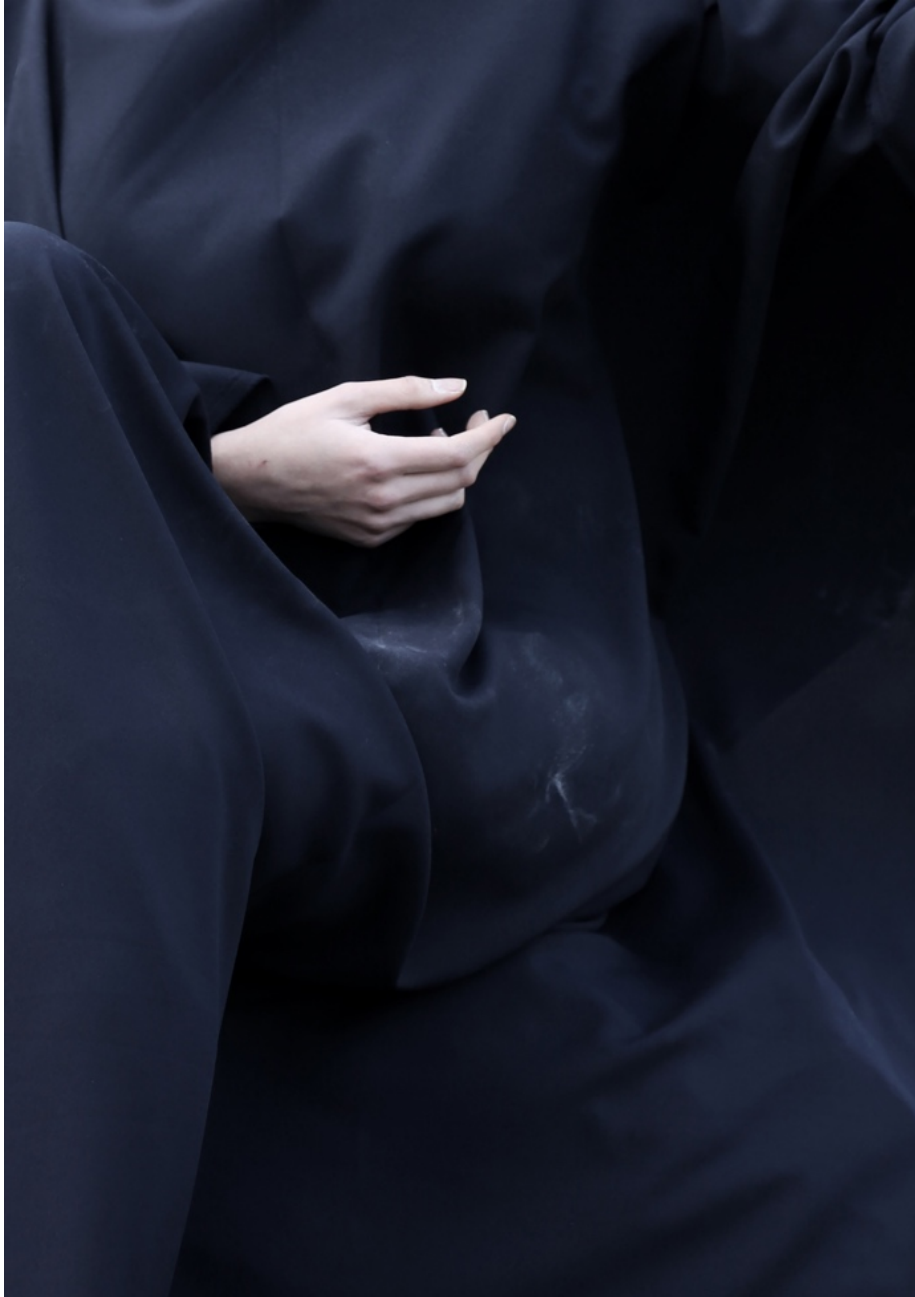


PHO350 Development Portfolio:

Critical Review



Ekleipsis

Emily Gardner, 2018

This Critical Review is my own unaided work and its length is 2001 words.

I confirm that the research and writing of this Critical Review is entirely my own and I have not plagiarized any portion of this work. I have not worked with any other person inappropriately. I also consent to this work being stored electronically for the purposes of use within plagiarism detection systems in order to check the integrity of the assessed work. I consent to a copy of this Critical Review to be retained by Falmouth University.

Signed:  egardner

Date: 12/12/2018

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Ekleipsis - Critical Review

Ekleipsis (meaning eclipse) is a body of work that stems from the ritualistic practice of witchcraft. In conversation with the natural elements, cyclical patterns appear and disappear throughout the portfolio – in reference to the lunar calendar/passing moon phases. *Ekleipsis*, seeks to explore, similarly to Donna Haraway’s notion of the cyborg (1984), the witch as a figure of resistance. Detailing, also, the act and trace of ritual as means to discuss an alternative way of living – derailing societal norms and questioning conventionality. Holding the form of a hand-crafted, tactile book, the portfolio veils and unveils sequenced imagery – disrupting visibility and casting eclipsed viewings.



Fig.1 (Emily Gardner, 2018, *Ekleipsis: Ostara*)

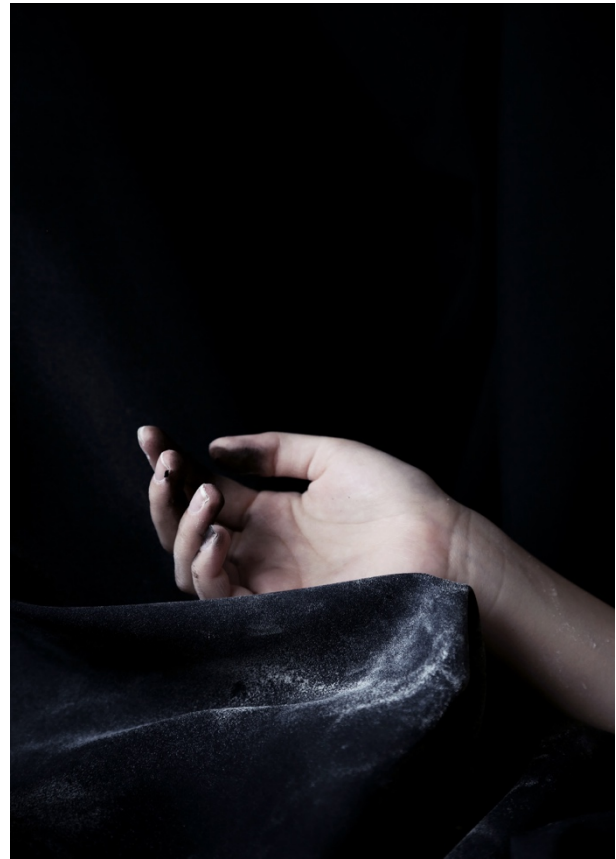


Fig.2 (Emily Gardner, 2018, *Ekleipsis: Samhain*)

Drawing on the “history of persecution” (Spratt, 2018), and taking the ‘hysterical’ woman into account, *Ekleipsis*’ considers the reclamation of the term witch within modern feminist critique and conversation. The work marks potential in the fluidity of the witch, as a non-systematic category – presenting a freedom, visually mirrored in the movement of fabric Fig.2, that surpasses the confines of gender and sexuality. Calling, also, upon the relationship between witchcraft and the landscape Fig.1, as a

form of escapism. It is, at once, about connecting with “women’s liberation, feminism, the occult, the meta-physical and the natural world.” (Spratt, 2018)

As a historical image, the female witch presents “pain, persecution, and fear” (Pandolfo, 2018), detailing a darkness and noting the struggles endured. Yet, in contemporary culture she holds the ability to represent freedom, optimism, and positive feminine power. The transformative state in which the figure of the witch resides, allows space for new conversation, regarding the rigidity of patriarchal structure, to arise. With regards to traditional society, the witch stands as one of the select few images of “independent female power” (Hutton, 2018). So, it is not surprising to note a “rising feminist passion” (Hunt, 2018) for all that the figure embodies. In response to the likes of Goya Fig.3, and his misogynistic etchings of the hysterical, ageing woman, twenty-first century practitioners, such as Linda Stupart and Kate Peters, have looked to uproot culturally embedded - and demonic - depictions of women. Similarly, I hope to invite the viewer into conversation, arousing, through the use of sequenced imagery, an alternative lens from which to view and discuss gender, the body, and witchcraft.



Fig.3 (Francisco Goya, 1799,
Linda Maestra!)

The return of the witch in contemporary culture, as a significant motif for “feminist, environmentalist, and post-colonial reinterpretations” (Jeffreys, 2018), reclaims/reinvents the historical - and hysterical - image of woman. Harboring previous associations of “pain, persecution, and fear”, to channel notions of strength and resilience. In this context, the visual narrative that spreads through Ekleipsis, seeks to paint unusual, and ritualistic instances, under a seductive light. The rituals documented are open to interpretation, and with no literal intention, they allow the reader to cast their own viewing(s) – attempting to derail connotations of the witch/women as evil and demonic.

Ekleipsis maintains, for the most part, a dark tonal range, while the draping of various fabrics further exemplifies a rich, and historic narrative – referencing classical painting and thus archaic representations of women within art history. Many of the images detailed within the book, document the moment in which the act is performed, or alternatively, the moments after – allowing both a sense of stillness and disruption to occur. Inquiring notions of the unseen/unseen energy, the traces of ritual become almost artefactual. Dampened hair pressed against glass, the dusting of flour between palms, the smoke of an extinguished fire, and suggestive hand gestures, transform instances of normality - pushing forward alternate readings and presenting a sense of peculiarity.

An eclectic range of research has informed the diversity of development shoots, as well as the final selection of images. In the beginnings of the project, I was able to shoot with a sense of freedom I have never had before. Usually, I am fairly pedantic about what it is I shoot and will follow a precise plan. Avoiding this rigid structure, that can at times become quite restrictive in terms of creativity, I set aside particular days in which to produce work. Gathering a number of interesting objects and laying them out in front of me encouraged a playful approach to picture-making – I applied this same technique/spontaneity when working within the landscape.



Fig.4 (Elena Helfrecht, 2018, *The Origin of Touch*)

Drawing, consciously and sub-consciously, from the semiotics and aesthetics detailed in the works of Elena Helfrecht Fig.3 and Esther Teichmann, I considered the potential of “the photograph as a portal” (Brier, 2014) – a looking glass in which to comprehend uncommon realities. As Jessica Brier discusses, we “encounter

[photographs] as a remnant of a moment past” (2014), disconnected from the instance in which the viewer experiences it. Following this understanding, the work aims to bring forward traditions practiced within modern witchcraft, with the use of text, the inclusion of sabbats (annual celebrations), and a book system structured around the wheel of the year. Rituals and spells, once performed, become also “remnants of a moment past” – the supposed magic/energy created, however, transcends the boundaries of time and exists, unseen to the eye.

The highly conceptual aesthetics detailed in Luca Guadagnino’s (2018) remake of 1977 cult classic, *Suspiria* - which builds on the “tension of the implied supernatural presence” and exploits “our fear of the unknown” (Baska, 2018) – provided further reference. In conversation with Emma Davidson, costume designer Giulia Piersanti notes how the garments worn in *Suspiria* “answer to [the] movement and rhythm” of dance (2018). Similarly, *Ekleipsis* looks to awaken otherwise dormant materials – carried by the wind or positioned in ways to emphasis versatility. *Suspiria*, as an interpretation of witchcraft, draws parallels between “arts and culture, the act of creation, and artistic gesture” (Baska, 2018). Viewing, also, *The Surrealist Collection*, held in the archive at Falmouth Gallery, offered an alternative source of inspiration. Although not entirely relevant in terms of subject, works from the likes of Roland Penrose **Fig.4**, introduced a sense of displacement, of eccentric performances and uncommon occurrence.



Fig.5 (Roland Penrose, 1937, *Max Ernst covered in seaweed*)



Fig.6 (Luca Guadagnino, 2018, *Suspiria*)

In collaboration with graphic designer, Bethany Rush, the book exhibits a number of creative processes, which have been tested, and specifically selected to enhance the imagery inside. For instance, the sleeve in which the book is contained, forces the viewer to physically unveil the work, engaging with on-going themes of visibility, concealment, and the obscured. The paper, after a lot of back-and-forth with the supplier, G.F Smith, has been chosen to mimic the aesthetic, and visual nature of the print. For instance, the soft white matt paper bound within the French folds, feels silky to hand. The weight of the paper (170gsm), selected to allow a controlled amount of movement - the properties of the paper engaging with the fabrics detailed within the printed imagery. The conversation between materials, i.e. the hand-made, tactile paper, used to create the French-folds against the inner matt sheets, exhibit a sense of consideration.



Fig.7 (Unknown, 2013, *The Wheel of The Year*)

In terms of process/final outcome, *Ekleipsis* presents itself as a hardback book – using well-developed, and selective sequencing as a nod towards the rituals and rhythms of witchcraft. Following, also, *The Wheel of The Year* Fig.7, to reinforce the cyclical nature of the work, imagery is enveloped within eight separate French folds – in reference to the eight annual sabbats celebrated within modern witchcraft (the winter solstice, spring equinox, etc.) Discrete text, scribed around the outer edges of the pages and printed black on black, moves in motion with the wheel, changing its

position as each sabbat is introduced. The decision to include French folds Fig.8, introduces interaction between the viewer and the work. In order to reveal the enclosed imagery, the handler must tear the outer binding, performing, in a sense, a ritual of their own - the perforated edge tracing the act of human presence.



Fig.8 (Emily Gardner and Bethany Rush, 2018, *Scan of French Folds*)

Another key source of inspiration came from *Sabat* magazine, a publication that investigates the relationship between “witchcraft, feminism, [and] “ancient archetypes”, as well as offering insight into “what the occult means today” (Pritchard, 2016). Designer, Cleber Rafael de Campos, brings forward an atmospheric and seductive aesthetic, without appropriating the subjects at hand. *Sabat* draws upon the hidden nature of ‘the occult’, with obscured elements, and the repetition of gesture/motif noted throughout each issue. In response, *Ekleipsis* looks to physically mask the image(s), as an ode to the unseen. The image(s) remain dormant, waiting for the first viewer to unveil, and awaken what lies within – playing on historic connections to suspicion, fear, and the unknown.

The insight gained after speaking with Amber Shuvani, a practicing witch, greatly informed the design concept and process of *Ekleipsis*, as well as the concluding shoots. Upon conducting an online interview with Amber, she explained that, for her,

the finger is best able to direct “the energy that you create from within” (2018). Consequently, it seemed apt to have the viewer use their finger to tear the folds, rather than using an envelope opener, for instance. Information regarding the traditions practiced during each sabbat/celebration, also grew from this interview. The bundles of flowers and herbs (also known as smudge sticks) came from Amber’s knowledge of the sabbats. For each celebration, practicing witches will craft an alter/display, adorning a range of objects that relate to that particular festivity. So, after conducting further research, I gathered the appropriate materials and put together eight smudge sticks. Photographing, and inverting each bundle, before printing in white ink – an image of the bundle smoking on the front of each fold, to signal new beginnings, and then burnt out on the back, to indicate closure Fig.9.

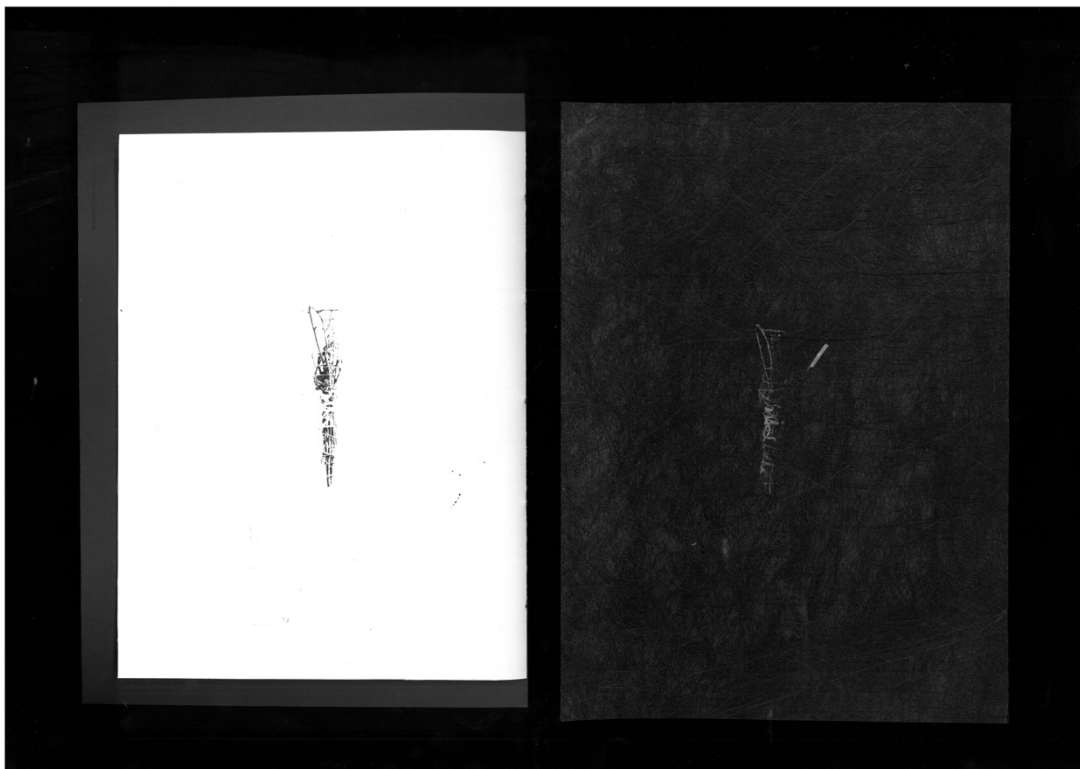


Fig.9 (Emily Gardner and Bethany Rush, 2018, *Scan of Smudge Sticks*)

In conversation with Duncan Wooldridge, we discussed the potential to select several images for print, to create a separate, free-standing narrative. Regarding the work outside of the institution, and in a professional context, it made sense to follow this advice. If I were to ever get the opportunity to exhibit, and the book wasn’t available (due to limited copies) then the prints could stand in. Additionally, despite vigorous testing, the print quality of the work inside the book does not reach full

potential, due to the limitations of available printing processes. If I were to acquire appropriate funding, then I would reproduce the book with a publisher, and print directly from plates. Engaging, also, with practitioners such as, Dafna Talmor and Clare Bottomley, allowed substantial feedback across a range of disciplines. Although not directly in relation to Ekleipsis, participating in visiting lecturer workshops urged a more open-minded approach to development and creation. Speaking with Graphics tutors Jon Unwin, and Dion Star, provided further commentary regarding presentation and delivery.

In summary, Ekleipsis notes, and deliberates from, the return of the witch within contemporary culture. Awakening dormant histories through modern abstraction, in an attempt to challenge archaic perceptions regarding the practice of witchcraft, and the female body. In response to the mistreatment of the accused, hysterical woman, the work brings forward, and questions, destructive associations tied to female power. Associations that have “seeped unconsciously into the marrow of childhood fantasy” (Lynne Segal, 2015) – dehumanising the ageing, non-conformist, woman, and fuelling the fear of becoming what history has chosen to repel.

Yet, the work skims only the surface of an ever-expanding conversation, regarding patriarchal structure, the demonisation of women in positions of power, rebel bodies, Trump’s America, and the reclamation of the witch under 4th-wave feminism. Upon reflection, although exploring the figure of the witch as a form of resistance, I think the portfolio, at points, remains passive. Consequently, Ekleipsis remains an on-going investigation, as I continue to expand and strengthen my archive of information. Despite this, I believe the work effectively presents - and pauses - in instances of ritual, to re-consider witchcraft as a form of reconnection, to both ourselves and the landscape.

Figure References:

Fig.1 GARDNER, Emily. 2018. *Ekleipsis: Ostara*.

Fig.2 GARDNER, Emily. 2018. *Ekleipsis: Samhain*.

Fig.3 GOYA, Francisco. 1799. *Linda Maestra!* Available at: <https://goo.gl/4dJ6kF> [accessed 26/09/2018].

Fig.4 HELFRECHT, Elena. 2018. *The Origin of Touch*. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Bi43DJ> [accessed 01/12/2018].

Fig.5 PENROSE, Roland. 1937. *Max Ernst covered in seaweed*. Falmouth Art Gallery.

Fig.6 GUADAGNINO, Luca. 2018. *Suspiria*. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ykU9xy> [accessed 02/12/2018].

Fig.7 Unknown. 2013. 'The Wheel of the Year'. Available at: <https://goo.gl/yhBCcx>. [Accessed 06/12/].

Fig.8 GARDNER, Emily and Bethany RUSH. 2018. *Scan of French Folds*.

Fig.9 GARDNER, Emily and Bethany RUSH. 2018. *Scan of Smudge Sticks*.

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