

EXHIBITION ✦ POINTE-À-CALLIÈRE

WITCHES

OUT OF THE SHADOWS





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FROM OCTOBER 25, 2024 TO APRIL 6, 2025

Witches - Out of the Shadows takes visitors on a fascinating journey into the heart of the mythical and multifaceted figure of the witch. The exhibition offers an immersion into the little-known history of witches and reveals their mysterious world. From marginalized women to modern feminist icons, learn how witches have inspired culture and asserted their influence down through the centuries.

An immersive setting surrounds the public in a bewitching atmosphere, alternating between myth and reality. Displayed throughout this captivating exhibition are more than 400 objects from over 30 European and North American museums, bearing witness to the history and rich heritage of witches.

WITCH, WHO ARE YOU?



Shaped by popular myths, witches are women with supernatural power. Often on the fringes of society, they are said to practice magic and master the secrets of nature. Sometimes feared and at other times admired, witches are multifaceted figures who are viewed differently from one era and culture to another.

Historically perceived as demonic women who practice the occult, witches were condemned to tragic fates in Europe between the 16th and 17th centuries. Starting in the 19th century, they became inexhaustible sources of inspiration for literature and then in popular culture, sometimes depicted as being evil, seductive, or benevolent. Today, witches are seen as symbols of resistance and resilience, possessing intuition, know-how, and autonomy.

Over the ages, witches have constantly reinvented themselves and evolved, reflecting the societies that have shaped them.

Crystal ball
© The Museum of Witchcraft
and Magic

WITCH HUNTS, A DARK CHAPTER IN HISTORY

At the end of the Middle Ages, Europe was rattled by profound crises: devastating epidemics, incessant wars, and religious and social reforms. In this climate of fear and uncertainty, the Catholic Church, supported by the elite classes, sought to strengthen its hold on the population and intensified its fight against heresy—any deviation from the strict rules of religion. The Inquisition, a religious tribunal, became an instrument of social control, accusing those who strayed from social and religious norms of witchcraft and pacts with the devil.

These accusations increasingly came to focus on women, perceived as being morally weaker. The fear of a destructive plot implemented by these supposed witches, corrupted by the devil, gave rise to a climate of general suspicion. This compelled the population and civil authorities to launch massive witch hunts. Between 1560 and 1630, it is estimated that around 100,000 people—most of them women—were tried in unjust trials and condemned to such tragic fates as torture, exile, or death.

WHAT WERE WITCHES ACCUSED OF?

In a society in crisis, the death of a child, bad harvests, illnesses, or soured milk could only be seen as being the work of the devil. Women accused of being witches were then suspected of having made a pact with the demon, who would give them malevolent powers. They were suspected of participating in occult ceremonies, proof of their ties with the devil.

INCRIMINATING PRACTICES

At the heart of witchcraft trials, practices deemed to be suspicious or out of the ordinary were often enough to lead to a conviction. While traditional medicinal knowledge, the use of healing herbs, or the practice of ancestral rituals could be seen as evidence of witchcraft, the simple fact of being an elderly, single, widowed, or marginalized woman was also enough to arouse suspicion and lead to accusations.



This painting illustrates the vision of demonic witchcraft conveyed in the 17th century—accusations of nocturnal gatherings and occult rituals—with a dark atmosphere and evil symbols: the devil, a cauldron, a toad, and a broom. These representations fed the fears of the time.

Incantation Scene
David Teniers II - 1650-1690
Oil on copper mounted on hardboard
The New-York Historical Society, New York



The *Malleus Maleficarum* (or The Hammer of Witches), published in 1486, is the Inquisition's reference manual, which precipitated the "witch hunts." This profoundly misogynistic work served as a model for many interrogations and summary judgments until the 17th century. Infamous in Europe, it has been reprinted around thirty times.

If you had lived in Europe in the 16th century, would you have been suspected of witchcraft? Try the interactive "Mirror, mirror, tell me..." to find out.



Malleus Maleficarum (or The Hammer of Witches)
Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, 1669
Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University.
With the permission of the Osler Library's board of directors.



Midwives or healers who used certain plants to soothe pain or treat illness were often the target of accusations. The Church, doctors, and magistrates had a suspicious view of this knowledge and these practices that escaped their control, associating them with witchcraft.

Webcap - Ceramic mushrooms
by Ernst and Alma Lorenzen.
Ernst & Alma Lorenzen © Canadian Museum of Nature



Apothecary jar, 1700-1749
Earthenware, enamel, pigments, paper, ink and glue
Collection of the Monastère de l'Hôpital général de Québec
© Le Monastère des Augustines

WITCH HUNTS IN THE NORTH AMERICAN COLONIES



Witch hunts are part of the history of the North American colonies between the 17th and 18th centuries. In New England, the Salem witch trials are emblematic of the collective psychosis spurred on by a fear of the devil and the social tensions in this puritan society. In New France, the fear of witchcraft is well-established, but judicial authorities remained rather tolerant, as there were only a few trials for evil practices, notably targeting men.

This painting shows a woman who was a victim of the Salem trials in 1692, when collective fear led to the conviction of twenty people for witchcraft. The model of this 19th century painting, is a descendant of one of the victims of the trials.

Witch Hill (The Salem Martyr)
Thomas Satterwhite Noble
1869, Oil on canvas
Collection of The New-York Historical Society, New York

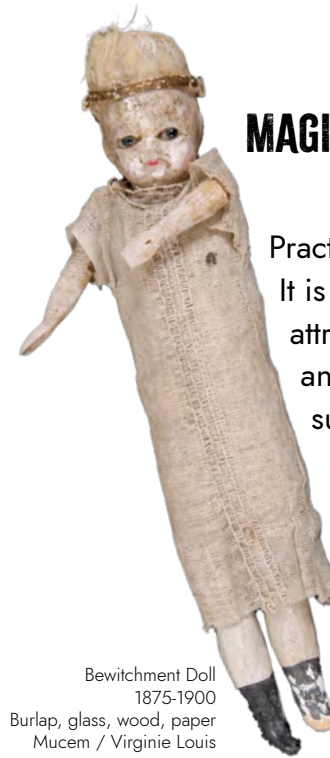
Anne Lamarque, a controversial innkeeper

Montréal, 1682. With her husband, Anne Lamarque ran a tavern that was very popular with men from all walks of life, both travellers and locals. As an independent woman who could read and write, she quickly became the target of gossip. She was accused of running a den of iniquity and leading an immoral life. According to the allegations of at least nine witnesses, Anne Lamarque owned a magic book from which she prepared spells, recipes for love potions, and preparations to induce abortions. Her own husband accused her of witchcraft and adultery. Despite everything, the innkeeper escaped punishment and was able to resume her activities.



Tavern sign, 17th – 18th century
McCord-Stewart Museum, 1975.33.1

MAGICAL PRACTICES AND POWERS



Bewitchment Doll
1875-1900
Burlap, glass, wood, paper
Museum / Virginie Louis

Practiced in various forms since antiquity, witchcraft retains an aura of mystery. It is characterized by rituals, gestures, and objects to which magical powers are attributed. Witchcraft practices include spells, protection and healing rituals, and the art of divination. These activities are part of a system of beliefs and superstitions, most of which are passed down from one generation to the next.

★ Spells and Charms

Spells are formulas or rituals intended to influence the course of events or a person's behavior... whether to attract love, bring luck or, quite the opposite, to harm someone.

★ The Art of Divination

Divination involves predicting the future using specific tools. These practices are based on the belief that future events can be revealed through signs or symbols. In the history of witchcraft, divination was a way to guide personal choices and understand the invisible forces influencing one's life.



Etteilla Tarot Deck
19th century, Cardboard
H. Berton – C. Imbert Collection/SEREST



Divination Hand
Late 20th century, Porcelain
© The Museum of Witchcraft and Magic

★ Protection and Healing

Protection and healing magic encompasses practices that aim to repel harmful influences and promote health. This includes the use or wearing of talismans, charms, and crystals. Their beneficial abilities may come from their materials, their specific form, or gestures and words that activate their power.



Quartz, Pre-2020
Sherbrooke Museum
of Nature and Science

THE WITCH IN POPULAR CULTURE

True icons of popular culture, witches became key characters in literature from the 19th century onwards. Little by little, beginning in the 20th century, they began to appear in films and television series, embodying a variety of archetypes ranging from the malicious old lady to the young and rebellious heroine. These representations reflect societal concerns and testify to the rehabilitation of the witch as a symbol of resilience and freedom.



This exhibition features witch costumes from Netflix productions, highlighting the diversity of representations in modern series. Agatha, a character from the film *The School for Good and Evil*. Courtesy of Netflix Production Archives, 2022

★ The Wicked Witch

The film *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)—highlights the archetype of the evil witch with a hooked nose and green complexion.

★ The Good Witch

The television series *Bewitched* (1964-1972) contributed to the vision of a mischievous and benevolent witch who uses her powers for the good of her family.

★ The Heroine

Hermione Granger is one of the central characters in the *Harry Potter* saga (1997-2017). Intelligent, persistent and courageous, she represents the powerful and independent witch of the 21st century.

★ The Protective Witch

The Halliwell sisters in the television series *Charmed* (1998-2006) embody an archetype of modern witches centered on sisterhood and female solidarity.



What kind of witches are you?
Let your wand tell you in
an interactive experience.

MODERN WITCHES AND FEMINISM

Since the 1950s, the figure of the witch has undergone a radical transformation. Having become symbols of resistance and empowerment, modern witches are rehabilitating this image. Drawing on history and myths, they have a deep connection with nature and the body, proclaiming their know-how, personal autonomy, and an affirmed authenticity. These contemporary witches express themselves through various media: whether by sharing their rituals and tools on social networks (#Witchtok), creating movements, or coming together for symbolic and activist actions. They also invest in artistic spaces, asserting their presence and influence in a changing world.



Kiki Smith is a major figure in the world of contemporary art. Her work explores female figures who are marginalized, oppressed, or perceived as threats to the social order—among whom witches hold a central place. *Woman on Pyre* perfectly illustrates this connection. The woman depicted on a pyre echoes the executions of witches, symbolizing both the brutality these women suffered and their inner strength. In Smith's work, the witch goes beyond her status as a victim, becoming a figure of resilience and power.

Kiki Smith – *Woman on Pyre*, 2001, Bronze, copy 2 of 3
Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

In Memory of Elizabeth Howe, Salem, 1692 by Lee Alexander McQueen is a collection that pays tribute to the victims of the Salem trials. It celebrates, in a way, his admiration for the feminine gender and the use of fashion as armor.



Woman's dress: *In Memory of Elizabeth Howe, Salem, 1692* by Lee Alexander McQueen
Fall/Winter 2007–2008 Collection
Photo: Abaca Press | Alamy Stock photo.

The 20th century was marked by women's struggles for equality. In the 1970s, witches resurfaced, inspiring movements such as the *Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell*, known by its acronym W.I.T.C.H., a feminist group active in the United States that has made the fight against male oppression its priority. Still active, W.I.T.C.H. has inspired the emergence of other activist groups.

✦ **Perspectives from today's witches**
 A series of statements by Québec women offers a contemporary look at the representation of witches today, revealing their unique experiences and perspectives. With the participation of Kim Lévesque-Lizotte, screenwriter and author; Léa Clermont-Dion, author and director; Sarah-Maria LeBlanc, herbalist; and Judith Lussier, journalist.



Members of W.I.T.C.H. Boston holding signs counterprotesting the Boston Free Speech on August 19, 2017. GorillaWarfare.



Excerpt from the exhibition interviews
 Here, Léa Clermont-Dion and Kim Lévesque-Lizotte.

Also explore interactive and multimedia experiences, including an original production by Silent Partners Studio with an original musical composition by Fanny Bloom and Thomas Hébert.



A FEW FUN FACTS

In Canada, the words "magic" and "witchcraft" were only removed from the Criminal Code in 2018.

The word "witch" (sorcière, in French) appeared in the 8th century. Derived from the Latin *sors*, it means both "fate" and "object of divination". The term *sagae* (witch in Latin) evokes wisdom and a keen sense of smell, emphasizing the link between perception and witchcraft.





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Montréal Archaeology
and History Complex