

TRANSMUTATIONS WITCHES HEALERS ORACLES



RAYMOND BUCKLAND'S

EST MUSEUM OF 1966
WITCHCRAFT AND MAGICK
CLEVELAND, OHIO



Walter Bird "The Devil Dancer" photogravure 1930

TRANSMUTATIONS WITCHES HEALERS ORACLES

photographic works by

LORENA TORRES MARTELL, ALEXIS KARL,

COURTNEY BROOKE, NAHW YG,

DESTINY TURNER WITH WORDS BY

KRISTEN J. SOLLEE AND AN ACCOMPANYING

COMPENDIUM OF WITCHY VERNACULAR

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE COLLECTION OF

STEPHEN ROMANO

cover image: Vintage lobby card circa 1967 - 1968

Transmutations: Witches, Healers, and Oracles at Buckland's Museum of Witchcraft and Magick

By ALFRED ROSENBLUTH, March 2021

Now through April 30th, Buckland's Museum of Witchcraft and Magick with guest curator, Stephen Romano, present "Transmutations: Witches, Healers, and Oracles", featuring works by Destiny Turner, Alexis Karl, Courtney Brooke, Nahw Yg, and Lorena Torres Martell, with accompanying words by Kristen J. Sollee and a compendium of vernacular works from the collection of Stephen Romano Gallery. Titled by participating artist, Destiny Turner, "Transmutations" directs our attention to artistic expression as a means of transmuting existential strife into profound beauty. For the countless many, like these artists, whose values affix to the act of claiming their identities as sovereign women, casting off the inherent limitations of patriarchal structures alone becomes a recurring act of self-reclamation.

This necessary path will find its expression through archetypes of the feminine potency whose mythic and historic inheritance scholar Kristen J. Sollee expounds upon:

The witch is a shapeshifter.

She transforms from vixen to hag,

healer to hellion,

adversary to advocate

based on who seeks her.

Being an unfixed sign, the witch is inherently abhorrent to ideology grant-

ing her carrier a chance to resist former internalized models of hegemonic power. Sollee continues:

She's Hecate, the ancient Greek goddess of the crossroads.

She's Lilith, the blood-drinking demoness of Jewish mythology who refused to submit sexually to her husband.

She's Baba Yaga, the Slavic hag in a chicken-legged hut who flourishes in the forest.

She's Yamauba, the monstrous Japanese mountain crone who feasts on human flesh in her tattered kimono.

She's Joan of Arc, the French military hero in white armor burned by her brethren for cross dressing and heresy.

She's Marie Laveau, the powerful Voodoo Queen of nineteenth-century New Orleans.

She's Elvira, vamping with a crucifix in her bountiful cleavage, dishing out double entendres.

She's Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani teen shot for her feminist advocacy and awarded the

Nobel Peace Prize.

She's the bruja at the botánica.

She's the practitioner of granny magic, hoodoo, and conjure.

She's the everyday intuitive, seeing and hearing things others do not.

She's everywoman.

The witch is at once female divinity, female ferocity, and female transgression.

She is all and she is one.

The witch has as many moods and as many faces as the moon.

Most of all, she is misunderstood.

*From *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (ThreeL 2017)

The identities Kristen presents range from the imaginal and timeless to the mundane and historic, which all can serve as potential allies to one's expression of identity. If anything, the single consistent feature of the witch is that she "most of all [is] misunderstood" – her nature, true to a law of the underworld, necessarily recedes from any attempts to grasp through common understanding.

This unseen quality reveals itself through Nahw Yg in her self-portraits – expressing hybrid goddess forms that dwell in the liminal. When first contacted by curator Stephen Romano, Yg admitted to never really considering herself an artist – finding only therapeutic value in her photography. In commenting on Nahw Yg and Destiny Turner's roots as autodidacts, Romano correctly places the conceptual material of their work in "their own life experiences, their trauma, their ordeals." So this work documents the embodiment of alternative forms as a modality of healing amplified through the language of the esoteric. While Nahw Yg transmutes the difficulties of such experiences through vocabularies of the universal feminine, Destiny Turner's work documents total immersion into the self. Turner's feats of self-possession externalize states of vulnerability with such appar-

ent ease, that her images become talismanic in their confrontation of the hidden – the authentic and raw emotionality of her work resists any convincing reductive analysis.

These artists cite the body as a crossroads where the presence it conjures contracts into function and movement as "The Oracle", whose eponymous archetype director and artist Alexis Karl communes with in a verdant dystopia. She and the land extend into one another through the medium of her dress; she grips a scrying water bowl between antlers as she entrenches her consciousness within the portents of this analog technology in deepening waves of ritual. Karl's film stills comprise a formal middle ground which preserves the minimalism of our first artists while calling in the influence of cinema, which as we'll note, significantly influences the remaining group of works. On the subject of cinema and femme revenge, should the archaic intensity in the expressions of Karl's muse, Hannah Fierman, have a certain familiarity, you've most likely already seen it in any one of the cult horror films in which she has played a starring role.

Reflecting on our last two artists, it would seem that while Destiny Turner and Nahw Yg chart the subjective interiority of the "everywoman", Courtney Brooke and Lorena Torres-Martell's work reclaims the image of the witch that has been coded by exoteric culture. Both artists exhibit a strong command of their craft of utilizing darkroom and digital techne to transmute photons into tapestries of the divine and the damned. Rich, matte hues of red and blue saturate Brooke's realms in perfected enchantments of light while rituals and solitary figures populate remote sylvan landscapes, reminiscent of 60s and 70s-era psych rock vinyl covers. Brooke's work presents an ennobled image of the witch as regent and celebrates a love for past eras and legends through a deeply original vision. The shift from "from vixen to hag" takes place in the work of our final artist, Lorena Torres Martell, who, without any doubt, of this group most directly evokes the affect of supernatural terror by which folklore estranged the witch from the safety of the commons. While the understated power of her co-exhibitors challenge

by holding a mirror up to the viewer, Martell's subjects withdraw from the shadows into full light to perform an aesthetically ruthless amplitude of horror. We are left convinced of how even the demonized wield a form of power in their marginalization, for little else could be more derisive of the status quo than the image of a sky-clad coven twisting their mutilated visages in its face.

Alongside these gems of contemporary visions hang riches of the past century. Included in this feast of vernacular works, we see original press releases and photographic documentation of traditional healers among which saunter original masterpieces of William Mortenson – a feature that should cause involuntary salivation in discerning audiences.

To step back and take in this feat of an exhibit as a totality, one is struck by how little apparent tension there exists between these multivalent works which, distinct in style, function, concept and era, nonetheless read as an integrated whole. This aesthetic coherence indicates a larger something, that has always been here and will apparently continue to be claimed by those who can channel, embody, and express its elusive nature. As the witch occupies a state of exception, bearing her identity brings one access to a self-congruence not afforded by society-at-large. To end on the import of Sollee's words: just as her detractors find only their own limitations reflected back in her direction, her basic self-integrity and wholeness which this exhibit clearly evidences can extend to those willing able to bear open witness.



William Mortensen "Ho Ho Off To Sabbath" Unique Bromide Print 1928

LORENA TORRES MARTELL

An ecstatic vision of an alternate universe.
A space of sanctuary unencumbered by God
or patriarchy.
A blood-soaked, clothing-optional, occult
paradise.
The stuff of nightmares.
The stuff of dreams.

Kristen J Sollee * From *Witches, Sluts, Feminists:
Conjuring the Sex Positive* (ThreeL 2017)
Inspired by art Lorena Torres Martell images.



“Noctícula” 2020 Digitally manipulated photograph



“Diabolique” 2020. self portrait Digitally manipulated photograph



"Ritual". 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph



“Into my dead eyes” 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph



“Coven” 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph

“My main inspiration is horror movies, gothic culture and the aesthetics of the grotesque, I am passionate about creating these types of images, I can spend hours in post production, I really enjoy creating characters with deformed features that reflect despair and suffering, witches, monsters and supernatural beings. The terrifying, the strange, the fear and death.”

-LORENA TORRES MARTELL



“The Crowned One” 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph

ALEXIS KARL

This land is alive.

The bedrock her marrow, craggy cliffs that undulate upward her spine, trees connective tissue. Skin and hair a skein of pine needles, almost noxious in their fragrance. Animals—mice, deer, wildcats, and birds—are her blood, teeming, scheming, stalking amongst her spindly bones.

The path that curves up her back slides between rows of tall, tall conifers like a lone finger raking through her thick green mane. Black clouds billow above like smoke from the fires that hail the great below.

Kristen J Sollee * From *Witch Hunt: A Traveler's Guide to the Power and Persecution of the Witch* (Weiser 2020)

Inspired by Alexis Karl images



detail of still from "The Oracle"



still from "The Oracle"



still from "The Oracle"



still from "The Oracle"



still from "The Oracle"

“My film Oracle is a spell.

My Film Oracle, featuring a hauntingly powerful performance by Hannah Fierman is a spell in and of itself. Every one of the Oracle’s movements is a moment of magic; A step upon the verdant ground, a glance into the scrying bowl filled with rain water, an incantation tumbling from her lips and spirited away on swells of music. Each of these moments, the Oracle harnesses the elements, calling forth visions of an uncertain future. Her growing fury demands the rewriting of the world, and we leave her there—a daughter of the dusk, cloaked in the spells of rituals past.”

-ALEXIS KARL



COURTNEY BROOKE

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She's Joan of Arc, the French military hero in white armor burned by her brethren for cross dressing and heresy.

She's Marie Laveau, the powerful Voodoo Queen of nineteenth-century New Orleans.

She's Elvira, vamping with a crucifix in her bountiful cleavage, dishing out double entendres.

(continued..)

Kristen J Sollee * From Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive (ThreeL 2017)

Inspired by Courtney Brooke images



"Hamon" photograph



"Sabbath" photograph



“East of The Sun” photograph



“Purification” photograph



“Form” photograph



“Cycle Unbroken” photograph



“Gilded” photograph



“The lowest Ebb” photograph

“My work explores the relationship between the feminine, the natural world and spirituality.

With influences such as witchcraft, the romantics, mother earth and death, I am exploring what it is to exist in a human form.

Ever since I was an adolescent I have been fascinated by the unrelenting pressure of time and it’s relationship to beauty. What starts out as yearning soon becomes manipulated into a tragedy of temptation, leaving only a sense of nihilism and the prospect of a new beginning.

I strive to create a visual moment that urges the viewer to question spirituality, the human experience and one’s own connection to the universe.”

--COURTNEY BROOKE



“Crimson Light” photograph

NAHW YG

She's Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani teen shot for her feminist advocacy and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

She's the bruja at the botánica.
She's the practitioner of granny magic, hoodoo, and conjure.
She's the everyday intuitive, seeing and hearing things others do not.
She's everywoman.

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She is all and she is one.
The witch has as many moods and as many faces as the moon.
Most of all, she is misunderstood.

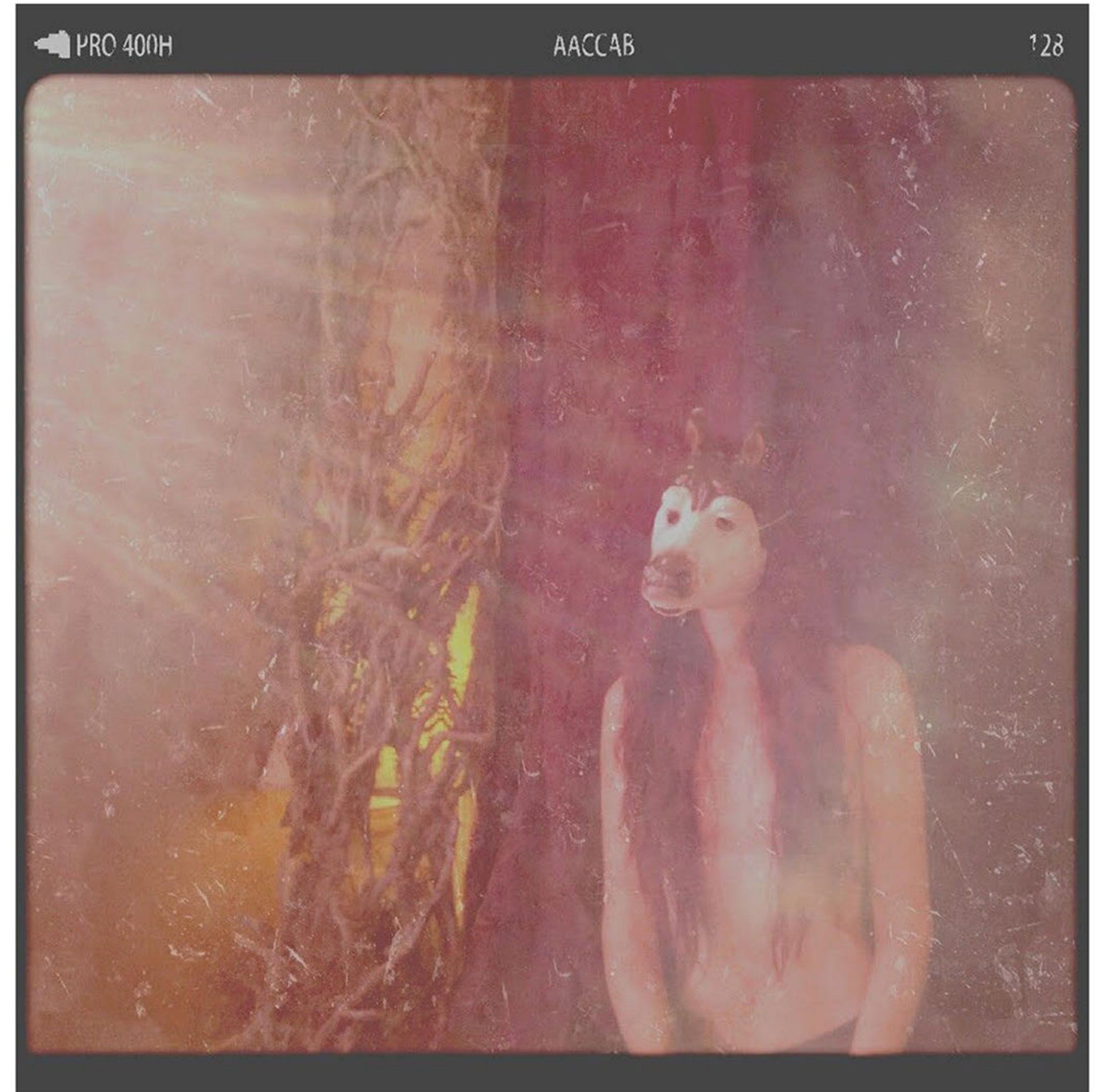
Kristen J Sollee * From *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (ThreeL 2017)



"The ritual" 2020 Manipulated photograph



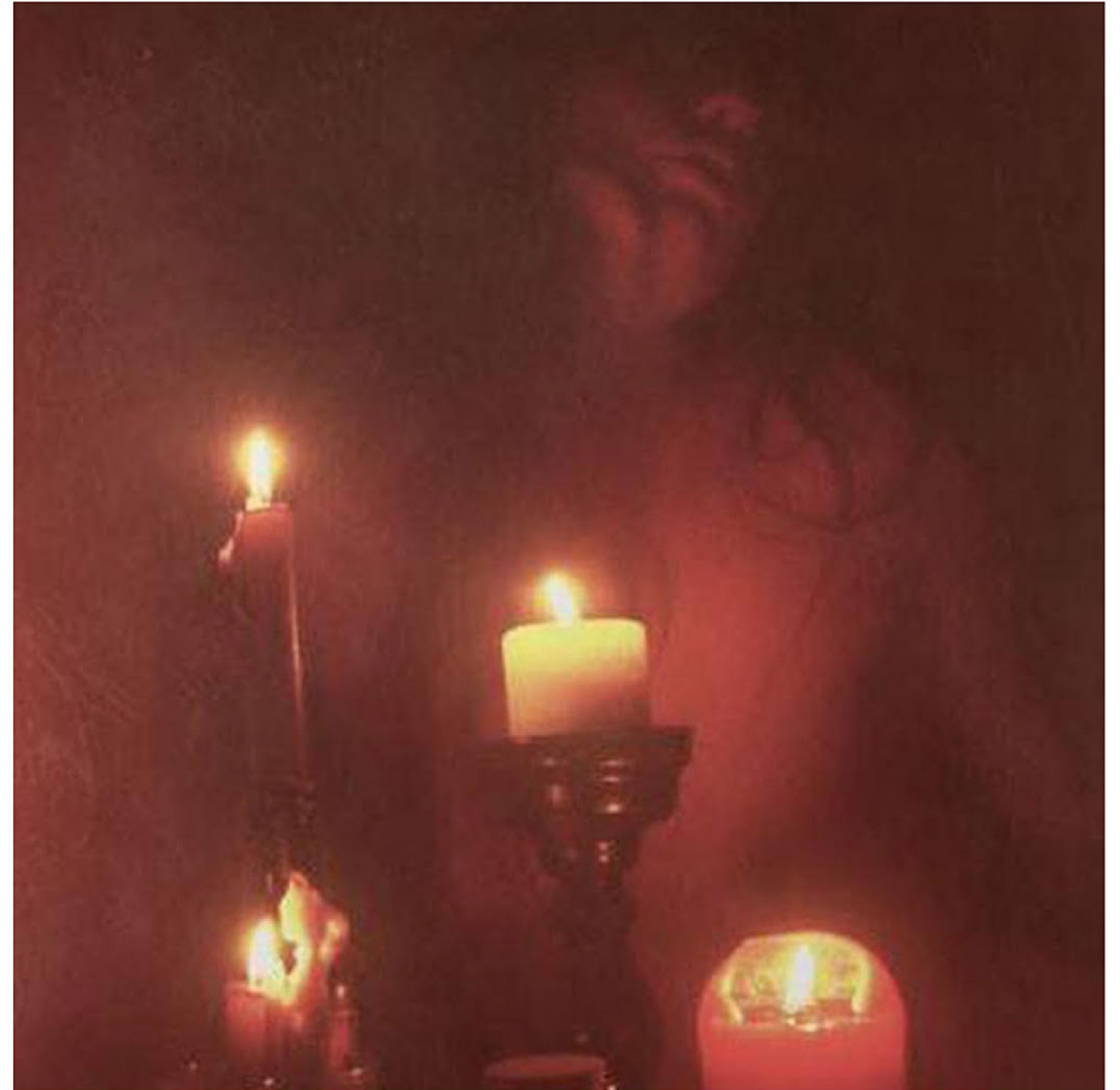
“Anthropomorphism” 2020 Manipulated photograph



“Anthropomorphism” 2020 Manipulated photograph



“Archeology of desire” 2020 Manipulated photograph



“Sea Of Fire” 2020 Manipulated photograph



“The Owl” 2020 Manipulated photograph



“Moon's eagerness” 2020 Manipulated photograph

“My practice of photography is instinctive. I try to give shape to the invisible, to my inner feelings. To All those questioning what we hold as the human beings we are. More particularly as a woman.

In the beginning, i think they were egotistical and therapeutic self-portraits . Over the time, i adopted a more universal feminine language, more structured and deeply rooted with my embodiment of the “animal woman” archetype, connected with nature and feelings, free and claiming.”

-NAHW YG



“The ritual” 2020 Manipulated photograph

DESTINY TURNER

Seven cervical.
Thirteen thoracic.
Seven lumbar.
Three sacral.
Twenty-one caudal.
Vertebrae stacked.

Strung together, sinew packed, the fearful symmetry of a cat by nature shifts shape.

Clavicles float free, anchored only in muscle.

Ribs tighten then protract.

Low and flat, lean and narrow, coiled serpentine, hair-on-end exalting in taking-up-space.

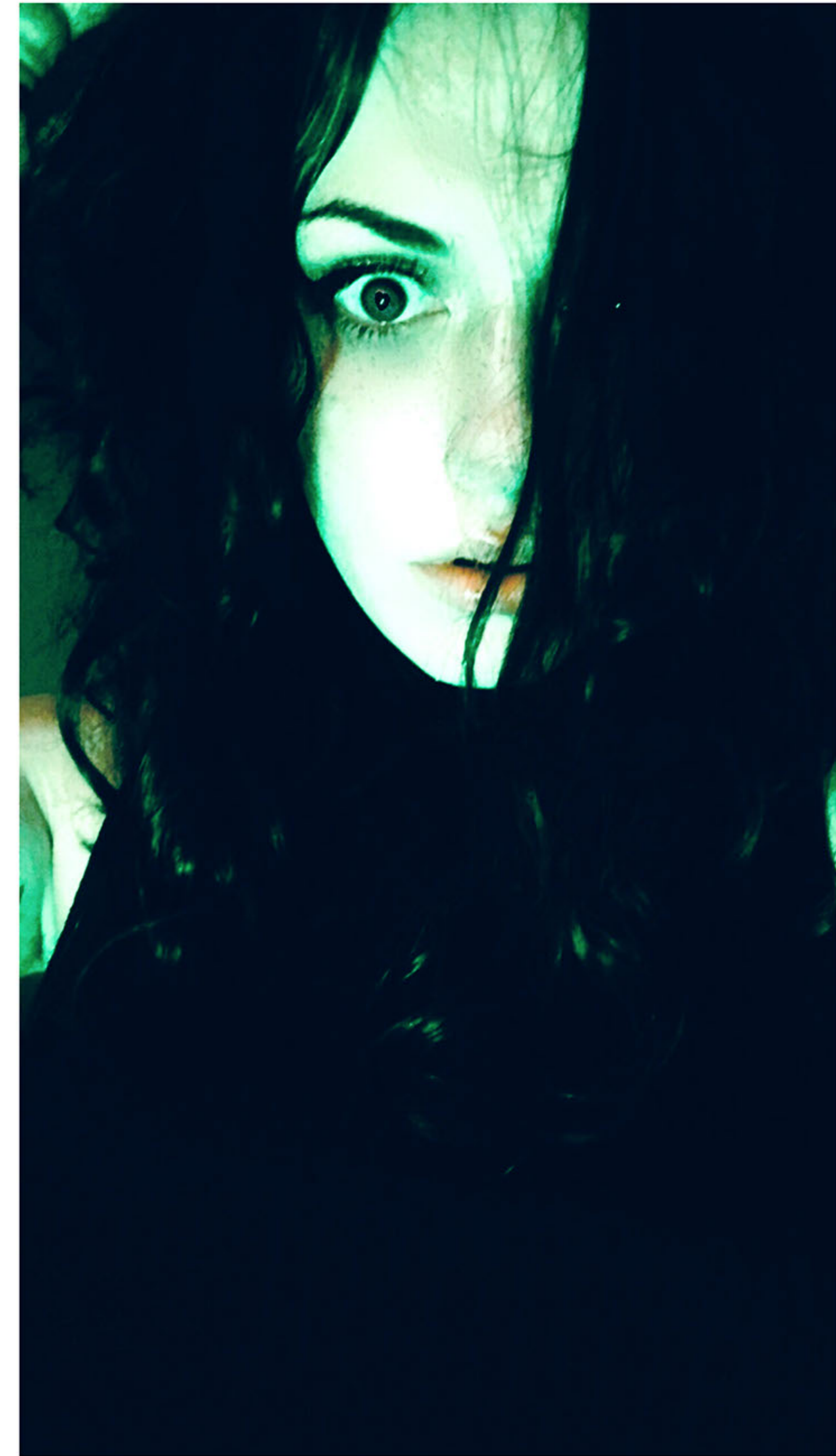
A compressible creature, shape-shifter.

Physicality fluid, befitting any situation or inquisitive whim.

Whiskers splayed wide,

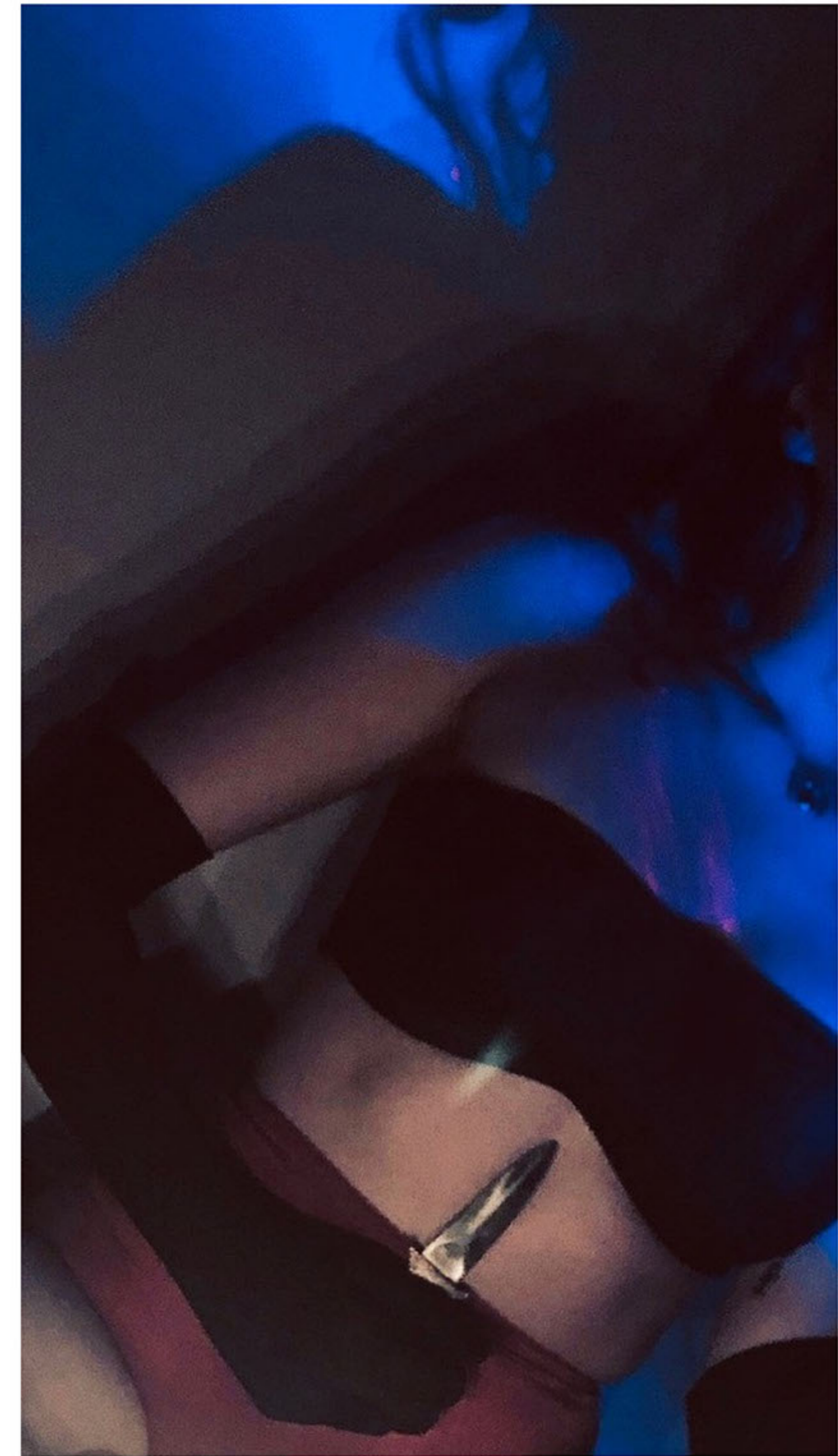
Sensing when her transformation should begin.

Kristen J Sollee * From Cat Call: Reclaiming the Feral Feminine (Weiser 2019)





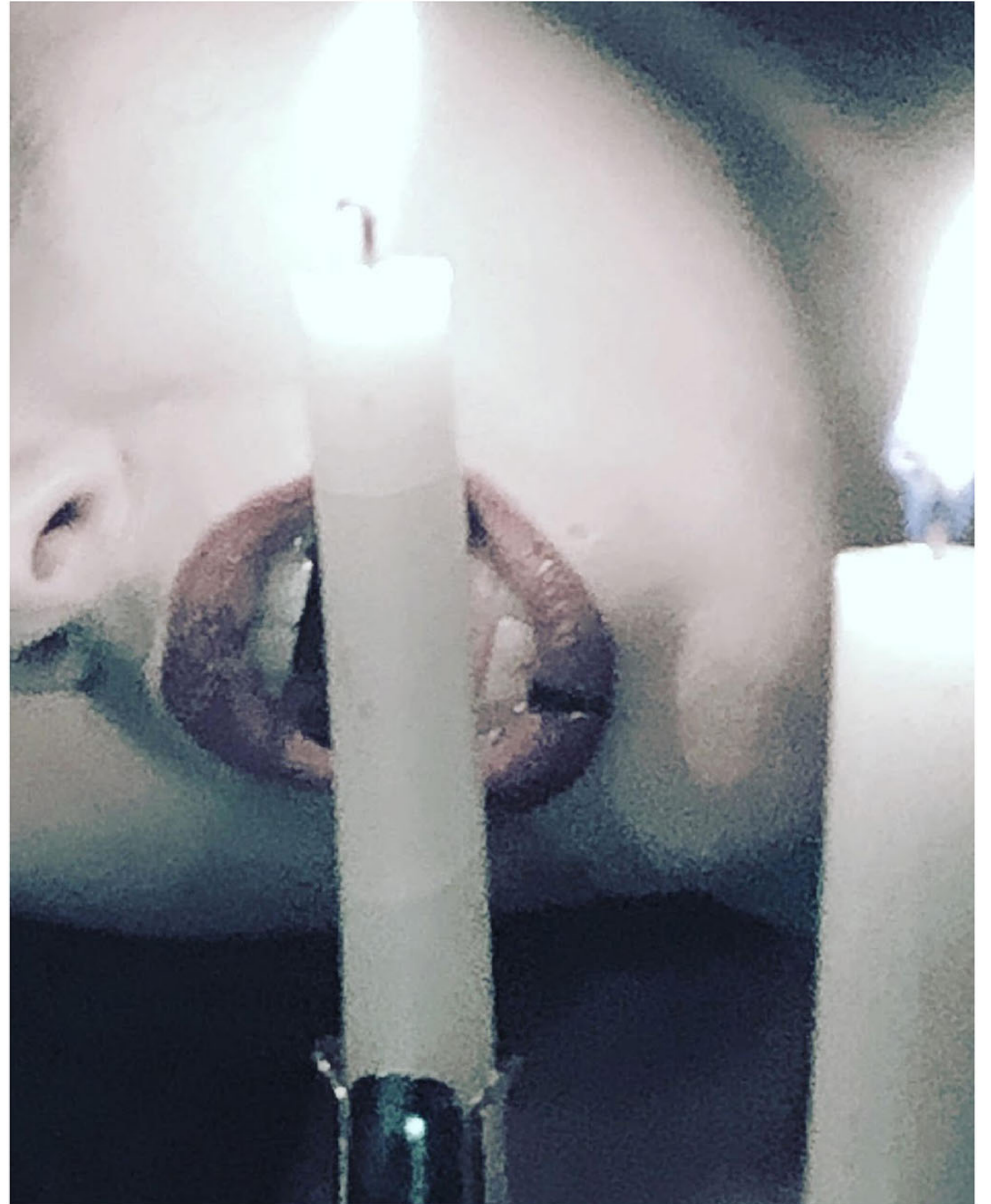
“Look into the void“ 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph



“Dark Amulet“ 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph



“The shadow and the light” 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph



“these romantic afflictions” 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph



“Visions“ 2021 Digitally manipulated photograph



“..The cycle of death and rebirth that we go through, and shadow work, something that’s just ever present in my thoughts..”

--DESTINY TURNER



-Vintage snapshots "Boy Witch" 1940's



Black Sabbath vintage first pressing of debut album cover photo by Keith Macmillan



John Everard "Adam's Fifth Rib" photogravure 1935



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ACME NEWSPICTURES, Inc.
CHICAGO BUREAU
TRIBUNE TOWER, CHICAGO, ILL.
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ACCUSED OF WITCHCRAFT
ROCHESTER, IND. - FULTON COUNTY AUTHORITIES WERE STARTLED
WHEN MEMBERS OF EIGHT FAMILIES DEMANDED THAT CHARGES
OF WITCHCRAFT BE FILED AGAINST MRS. IRENE RAY (ABOVE).
THE COMPLAINANTS CHARGED THAT MANY PERSONS HAVE BEEN
"HEXED" AND MADE ILL AND THAT AT LEAST ONE PERSON HAS
DIED UNDER THE SPELLS CAST BY THE MIDDLE AGED INDIAN
SQUAW WHO HAS LIVED HERE SEVERAL YEARS. AUTHORITIES
EXPLAINED THAT INDIANA HAS NO STATUTE FORBIDDING WITCHCRAFT
BUT ARRESTED MRS. RAY ON CHARGES OF VAGRANCY.
BFM #26-A YOUR CREDIT LINE MUST READ "ACME" 3-12-38

Acme New pictures Inc "Accused of Witchcraft" 1938



Vintage lobby card -International New Photos - "Devotee of a Witchcraft Cult in



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1956 JUL 9 PM 3 44

57

Slug DANCE - A
Size 3 1/2
For KIT edition Mon date
Ordered by NK

NEW DANCE: Devotee of a witchcraft cult in Brazil. This photo shows her in a trance-like state during a ritual. The dancer, who is said to have been a devotee of the Samba and the Mambo, is now popular through the trance-like state of the Samba. The Mambo, who goes through the trance-like state of the Samba, is now popular through the trance-like state of the Samba. The Mambo, who goes through the trance-like state of the Samba, is now popular through the trance-like state of the Samba.

-International New Photos - "Devotee of a Witchcraft Cult in Brazil" 1956



Lobby Cards for Mario Mercier's "La Papesse" 1975



Lobby Card for Mario Mercier's "La Papesse" 1975



Lobby Card for Mario Mercier's "La Papesse" 1975



Lobby Card for Mario Mercier's "La Papesse" 1975



-1986 Press Photo African Healer Cecilia Chingasiye in Harare, Zimbabwe



Signed ex-playmate Mary Collinson "Twins of Evil" Hammer Films 1971



-Original Vintage 1968 Kenneth L Whiting African Witch Doctor Anna Sithole Sagoma Photo.



Vintage Lobby card for the film "She Demons", 1958



Original vintage lobby card "Voodoo Devil Drums" 1945



-Unknown photographer, American, Vintage snapshot circa 1930's "Three Witches"



William Mortensen "Ho Ho Off To Sabbath" Unique Bromide Print 1928

stephen
ROMANO
gallery

www.transmutations.net