

#Coven: The Season of the Witch

JENNIFER RICHARDS

Back in September 2016 both Vogue and W Magazine referred to the collective fashion week catwalk shows as the “Season of the Witch.”^[1] This theme has been in its ascendance since then and has continued into 2017, reflecting a growing interest in, or fashion for, all things Occult.

Marc Jacobs’ promotional campaign for A/W 2016 brought together a range of famous faces to launch the collection including Courtney Love, Missy Elliot and St Vincent. Jacobs sought to restyle these individuals into a coven of gothic goddess. This was followed by a succession of different designers exploring the goth mentality including Christopher Kane’s surrealist A/W 2016 collection and Comme De Garçons’s A/W 2016 collection entitled “The Blue Witch.” Continuing this theme, Preen’s S/S 17 collection included pentagrams and references to witchcraft iconography. Models were bedecked and bejeweled with Occult symbols and styled with flowers pressed onto their lips—a look that vaguely recalled the 70s British Horror Classic *The Wicker Man*. This collection was inspired by the designers’ home on the Isle of Man with Thornton Bregazzi describing that witchcraft was a “normal thing” in his hometown. Finally, Alexander McQueen’s recent A/W 2016 promotional campaign depicted dreamy goth landscapes photographed by Jamie Hawkesworth in the remote Shetland Isles, cementing this current obsession with the mystic.

The use of witchcraft and gothic undertones has continued throughout the recent Fashion Weeks for A/W 2017. In New York, Alexander Wang and Eric Scholtsberg appropriated the goth glam look with particular reference to 90s horror classic *The Craft*. Alexander Wang created an all-female catwalk show, reminiscent of a contemporary style coven,

while continuing to empower his women in the trailblazing manner to which the fashion world has become accustomed. The collection was powerful yet feminine, with one model in a catsuit emblazoned with the motto “No After Party.”

In fashion terms, the themes of witchcraft and the Occult seem to have an unlimited amount of mileage. In the broadest sense black, for instance, is a classic; it has always been a part of some of the best-known designers’ collections; however, the color is also an allusion to the Gothic—a trend that has been stubbornly persistent since the emergence of the Rick Owens-inspired “Health Goth” look a few years back. According to WGSN, the trends of “Victoriana,” “Pastel Goth,” and “Sports Goth” have all evolved from Heath Goth over the past three years and are still prevalent within recent collections of fashion designers such as Rodarte A/W 2016 and Y-3 A/W 2017. This surge in interest has not just been exclusive to the catwalk but has also inspired the high street and more commercial brands such as Wild Fox and Gypsy Warrior. (In a less literal extension of the Gothic trend, one-time fashion writer turned actress Tavi Gevinson has taken it one step further by performing as the impressionable character of Mary Warren in Arthur Miller’s famous play *The Crucible* on Broadway...fashion’s literal embodiment of Goth.)

Beyond the catwalk, re-imagined representations of witches in popular culture have also proliferated, including in films like *The Neon Demon* and *Don’t Knock Twice* and television shows like *Penny Dreadful* and *American Horror Story: Coven*. Furthermore, the enticing and empowering visuals of the witch have propelled the growth of an online community of social media witches. On Instagram, young women transform themselves into modern witches through makeup tutorials and selfies, each one evolving their own visual styles and reframing witchcraft on their own terms. Posts with hashtags like #witchy, #coven, and #witchesofinstagram are growing in popularity.

Instagram influencer **Princess Gollum** explores her unique approach to the Occult by creating beauty looks to bewitch her followers (currently her coven clocks in at over 90,000 and is growing every day). By contrast, Bri Luna (a.k.a. **The Hoodwitch**), is a practicing witch. Her Instagram is beautifully curated and aesthetically enticing, but witchcraft is an authentic part of Bri’s life and spiritual journey. Beyond makeup, Bri curates a collection of “Everyday Magic for the Modern Mystic” (complete with witchy emoji and all).

So herein lies the dilemma: has this theme of witchcraft in popular culture become a commodified good, akin to something you can slip on and off like a pair of Louboutins, or is there something bigger at play? Can this surge in themes of the Occult be put to meaningful use in our

society rather than just a surface trend for the fashion conscious? Could witchcraft be a new communication platform, a way in which to get our voices heard to benefit women everywhere? Can this witchcraft be a celebration of female empowerment in these hotly political times? In an increasingly uncertain world, witchcraft could perhaps become a means of asking women to reflect on their own heritage and beliefs. From the Salem Witch Trials to more recent political ‘witch hunts,’ the strength and resilience of the witch could enable women to revisit a place within themselves that may have been forgotten—a place in which they can find our own authenticity, truth, and channel mystical power...perhaps something bigger to believe in when worldly institutions begin to break down.

Perhaps now is the time to rid the world of the negative myths and stereotypes of the witch and what she used to personify historically, replacing her with a strong, complex and authentic woman worthy of respect, *warts and all*. Witches were historically feared, after all, for they mysterious interiority and imperviousness to the patriarchy. In 2017, are these not positive, aspirational qualities? For their part, designers are taking the witch theme and running with it in creating modern sartorial #covens. Surely this new interpretation of witchcraft can only serve to instill us all with the hope of a better future in a world that is currently in flux.

Indeed, in the words of the 90s film *The Craft*, witchcraft in 2017 can be seen as a new call to arms: “Now is the time. This is the hour. Ours is the magic. Ours is the power.”

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JENNIFER RICHARDS

Jennifer Richards an academic within Manchester Metropolitan University. She has ten years experience of teaching in the Higher Education sector specialising in Fashion and Visual Communication.