

Linda C. Hulst, Colloquium Abstracts

Lecture/discussion # 1

Introduction: Feminist Art History and Early Modern Images of Women

The early modern image of the witch was invented—to use a term from Renaissance art theory—by male artists who wanted to display their imaginative prowess. From the beginning, this deeply misogynistic image was closely related to a protean Renaissance ideal of artistic creativity that only males could attain. In this series of three lectures and discussions, we will explore the dynamic and complex relationship between male artistic potency and denigrated female images that will continue into the modern era. We will begin with an overview of female imagery in early modern Europe that establishes a spectrum of interpretations of womanhood—from the paradoxically virginal mother represented by Mary, to virtuous female saints and classical heroines. Then we will turn to the anti-types of feminine virtue, such as Eve and Venus, domineering wives, prostitutes, and hags, all of whom contributed to the image of the witch. We will also suggest how gender roles shaped allegories and female portraits in ways that sustained patriarchal power.

Lecture/discussion # 2

The Witch as Woman and Muse (Chapters 1, 2, and 3 in *The Witch as Muse*)

The early modern European witch was guilty of both harmful magic and heresy, allied with the devil and demons to destroy the Christian order, and predominantly female. Why were witches usually women? Many answers have been proposed, but artistic images of witches reveal that ideas about the female body and feminine nature were crucial. Along with early modern ideas about women, Renaissance art theory nurtured witchcraft imagery by valuing the male artist's display of and control over the same faculties of imagination and fantasy that the devil was able to corrupt in female witches. The concept of witchcraft dovetailed with contemporary notions of artistic creativity and made witchcraft images useful when artists wanted to promote themselves to elite male audiences. We see this in the German artists working when the early modern concept of the witch was born—Albrecht Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien. They responded to the early formulation of the demonic and heretical female witch in the *Malleus maleficarum* and other sources, seizing this concept to exhibit their inventive capacities to potential patrons well before the onset of large-scale witch-hunts after 1560.

Lecture/discussion # 3

The Witch in Art at the Height and End of the Hunts (Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 in *The Witch as Muse*)

In this lecture and discussion, we will observe the image of the witch continuing to signify artistic creativity regardless of attitudes toward witchcraft in different historical contexts. In the politically divided Netherlands at the height of the hunts, Frans Francken II and Jacques de Gheyn II used images of witches to show their imaginative capacities while working in countries with divergent views on witchcraft: the Dutch Republic generally took a skeptical, restrained approach, yet the Spanish Netherlands viewed witchcraft as serious threat to the orderly Habsburg state. For de Gheyn's scholarly audience, the witch's magic may have symbolized an anti-science, while Francken's teeming paintings of witches probably evoked the chaos of the disorderly state for his audience of wealthy collectors. Finally, Francisco Goya worked during the Enlightenment and early Romantic period when belief in witches had long been discredited. His witchcraft images built on the baroque concept of the *capriccio*. In the mid-seventeenth century, Salvator Rosa and Giambattista Tiepolo had used witchcraft and magic as the subjects of *capricci*. In the 1790s, Goya explored witchcraft along with other bizarre and violent themes as he sought to reinvent himself and change his patronage base. In the etched series, *Los Caprichos*, and in his later "Black Paintings," he satirized beliefs about witches to discredit the Spanish Inquisition and, ultimately, human folly itself. These works epitomized artistic fantasy while also serving as profound social critiques.