

RITE OF PASSAGE



Vancouver-based performance artist Miki Aurora fuses ritual and art to illicit psychological shifts in her audience. Exploiting the power of symbols, she summons invisible reactions in the viewers, who associate these symbols with narratives or tropes in the subconscious mind.



Elisabeth Krohn:
What does the word
Witch mean to you?

Miki Aurora: The word Witch connects to all women, that's what's really beautiful about it. I believe that all women have the ability to tap into their innate power, to their own reservoir of spiritual energy to move and transform the world in ways we have been taught should not be possible. This could be interpreted in a literal way — we are moving things that shouldn't actually be moveable — or in a more metaphorical sense where Witches can transform the zeitgeist of our world. Right now we are starting to see the shackles of patriarchy fall away. Being a Witch at this moment in time means that we are existing in that intersection point, the power of that destruction and death is ours to channel if we tap into it.

By
Elisabeth Krohn

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What inspires you to
create your art?

I think that that personal suffering can be a gateway to tap into an abyss that is sometimes metaphorical, ethereal and literal. It can form a reservoir of power that you can draw on as an occultist and occult artist, something to bring to light and show the world.

Do you think occultism
and feminism are related?

Totally, Witchcraft has such a long feminist history. Sometimes I wonder if the persecution of Witches and women is partly because the power women have as life-bringers is so potent that it's almost like: "can we trust women with this power? We better stamp this out before it gets out of hand." But I guess that's too late...



What's your personal relationship with the crone archetype — do you relate to it even though you're not in that phase of life yourself?

I relate to it in the sense that potency of the feeling of death is something that appears a lot in my work. It motivates a lot of my work. It can be the kind of death that precludes you entering a new phase of reality. I have had a really intense experience doing trauma healing rituals, to remove some of the trauma stuck in my subconscious. For about two years I was doing multiple trauma healing rituals a week, releasing trauma in a way that made my body really sick. That whole phase of my life was a kind of death. I had visions of worms eating my corpse, decomposition and new life growing from it.

I definitely think trauma precludes different forms of enlightenment. Falling apart is probably one of the most direct routes to remoulding parts of yourself, in order to move on. If your life feels perfect, what would motivate you to look for supernatural means to achieve anything?

In what way are ritual and performance connected practices for you?

Ritual is the main modality of performance art I like to work in. For a long time, since I was a teenager, I've been working with ritual magic. I always thought that it would be so interesting to transform this into my work. I started working in video art and doing rituals in my video artwork. Then I transitioned into performance, because performance enables me to bring the attendees into the experience, creating a potent social sculpture.

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Could you tell me a bit
more about the new piece
you debuted in August?

I was trying to create awareness about the
lived reality of women — our every interac-
tion is coloured by the outside perception of
our physical appearance. Even if it is uncon-

scious, in every interaction women have, they are being
sized up based on their external appearance, and the
treatment that they receive, is based on the societal value
judgement placed on that physical appearance.
So I used the "barbie girl archetype" as one example of
this — pointing out the all too common dynamic, that if
people see a blonde woman wearing pink, they immedi-
ately assume she possesses certain traits, or perhaps even
that she is unintelligent — they subconsciously assume
she is the character that they are familiar with from movies
and television. So this piece was to make people aware of
these knee jerk assumptions that we have about all differ-
ent kinds of women. And I had two performers chanting
a Sanskrit mantra for three hours, dressed as popular
female archetypes (I teamed up with fashion designer
Alex S. Yu to put together the outfits) to draw awareness
to this. Next to each of them was an interactive website
I made discussing the phenomenon of people projecting
onto women based on their physical likeness to archetypes
from entertainment media. While the durational perfor-
mance was happening, I saw that the boyfriend of one of
the performers had tears in his eyes. So I went up to him
and asked him what was going on, and he said that he was
just realizing, the intensity of what that experience for
women must be like — for his girlfriend, what she has to
go through, every single day, to have people size her up
and decide whether she is competent or intelligent based
on her appearance. I think the gravity of that reality just
kind of hit him. To have someone shed tears in light of a
realization elicited through my work just means so much
to me, because it is truly a deep sadness that I have known,
that fills me, when I think about the depths of the objec-
tification that comprises the lived experiences of women.
The psychological violence of it. So it meant a lot to see
this kind of catharsis. I can't begin to describe the kind
of effect it has on you as an artist when you facilitate this
kind of moment of realization and solidarity in another
human being through your work.

