

ZABLUDOWICZ
COLLECTION

Invites

REBECCA
PARKIN

10 NOVEMBER –
18 DECEMBER 2022

Julia Greenway: Could you start by describing the *Green Women* series? How did these works come about, and what has been your process in developing and expanding on them?

Rebecca Parkin: They started from an interest in fan art. I've long been inspired and influenced by fan art illustrations such as portraiture, movie posters and film stills, and I love the character portraits from horror and fantasy films. That was my starting point, and from there I began to focus on the villainous women in popular culture and how these women were depicted as demonic, possessed, or otherworldly. Their unpredictable temperament was often visually indicated by a green skin tone, used to signify villainy and sorcery.

I also find that it's helpful for me to formulate a set of constraints when generating work. I typically have several different series or bodies of work happening at one time. Once I locked in on these green portraits on the red background, I continued to push them. Staying consistent with the red paper and green make-up caricatures allowed me to bring in playful elements such as diverse expressions and satirical personality names.

JG: As your work suggests, there is a pop culture fascination with the demonic femme. We see this character recurring again and again in film, and in literary and cultural narratives. It feels very much like an eroticised trope. How do you deal with this in your work? Is there a particular thematic critique that you wish to take on through this series of drawings?

RP: Yes, green women in popular culture are often overly sexualized, for example the Orion slave girls from *Star Trek* – green-skinned, seductive, extra-terrestrial humanoids. Other times, green women are depicted as vile, such as the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*. These characters come from a place of fear of the feminine, and in a way I wanted to use that as a tool. I'm inspired by the ability of these characters to draw attention to these histories and flirt with their intended demonic tropes.

JG: Do you feel that you are giving the women in these portraits back a sense of agency?

RP: Yes, definitely. My depictions are not of them as monsters, seductresses or victims, as they were originally depicted. It's important to me that I represent them as agents of their own will. There is an element of parody and satire in these works, but I also want to celebrate the women as magical and enchanting feminine beings in addition to being powerful and absurd. In creating portraiture with care and appreciation of film and art historical modes of composition-making, I can provide a visual softness that possibly wasn't there before.

JG: You have conceptualised an entire setting for these women with your installation. How did you approach taking on the Invites space and realising an environment for these works?

RP: The installation was conceived from the overly stylised film sets of the 'witchploitation' genre authored by Italian filmmakers Mario Bava and Dario Argento in the 60s and 70s. I love the way these films look and feel, and have always been attracted to the strong visual

colours and dramatic backlighting used to intensify and heighten the horror, kitsch and drama of their narrative. I set out to use similar tools and trickery when I was making my work. I wanted to respond to the chapel feel of the exhibition space, while also playing up some of the references to the sets of B-horror movies. We've installed a red accent wall, chiffon draping, rich warm wood framing and film gels over the windows, all of which feel very much of the era. I wanted to use, and respond to, the church architecture, especially the benches and lead windows of the space, to layer in this nostalgia towards the film sets that inspire my work.

In drawing inspiration and staging from films such as *Suspiria* (1977) or *La Papesse* (1975) the installation references satanic cults and rituals of the feminine collective. This is the first time I have shown all the *Green Women* drawings together as a collection. They are often presented as individual portraits in a group show setting, and I feel that by presenting them all together they are engaging in ritual, mysticism, and collective ceremony.

JG: Can you talk about the *Vanitas* installation and how this sculptural still life came about?

RP: Along the lines of cinematic representation, I felt inclined to include props and make-up in the exhibition in some way. This particular arrangement atop a bespoke wooden altar within the central window is modelled from the vanitas genre of still life painting from the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. These paintings contained a collection of symbolic objects as metaphors for the inevitability of death: carefully placed objects relating to pleasure, time and worldly pursuits. Artfully arranged as an altar or shrine, these still life paintings were executed with a precision and skill that I have always admired and aspired to. I wanted to bring together props and objects that speak to traditional painting, but also to intersect the satanic and performative devices of film sets and set-making.

The skull was a common object in vanitas paintings, used to represent the brevity of life. I have included one here with exaggerated googly eyeballs and oversized witch hands – a satire through props to poke fun at this seriousness, in a way. I also included objects that symbolise wealth and luxury: a lobster, oysters, candles, a beer stein. There is a moralistic overtone with these compositions, that one shouldn't enjoy life too much, yet they are executed as very sexy, opulent oil paintings.

With that thematic take in mind, I wanted to include the props of my artistic practice. In the *Vanitas* installation, I included the face paint and brushes I used to prepare models for the *Green Women* portraits, as well as the pestle and mortar used to make the pastel pigments for my drawings. Bringing all these elements together feels like a fun, playful conflation of all the different worlds within my practice, which is new and really exciting for me.

JG: You do break the illusion a bit with the inclusion of the props and make-up in this sculptural work. Is exposing the behind-the-scenes of your process a new important layer?

RP: Yes, I always want the work to have a cinematic feel, but for me it comes back to this very distinct period of cinema. The popular styles and tropes from the horror and science fiction genres are not only entertaining and seductive, but they are also accessible to many. I am drawn to the film stock aesthetic of the 60s and 70s era, I love the textural quality of puppets, prosthetics and pyrotechnics incorporated across sets and narratives.

I am also attracted to the way movie posters were made at the time, and incorporate their design elements into my work as well. B-movie posters have a really unique language: they are an advertisement to entice viewers to come to see the film using a single image. They have strong compositional cues and techniques to pull viewers' attention.

JG: It feels like the outcome of the installation is a layering of classical painting, B-movie posters and horror-film sets from the 60s, all of which are incredibly nostalgic.

RP: Yeah, my work is a collection of all my favourite things from art history and film.

JG: You are working with a very specific subject matter in the portraiture of these women. We are talking about a historical moment in the way women were depicted across film, science fiction, comics and illustration. These characters were hyper-sexualised, and more than likely developed by men for men. How do you address this feminist perspective in your work?

RP: I'm interested in the history of women's experiences, the history of how women are depicted in popular culture, how this has changed over time, and how those images also have feedback in society and vice versa. There have been changes in sexual and gender politics, absolutely, but when it comes to the representation of women in cross-cultural content, you also see how that representation gets recycled. With my work, I set out to build a world and leave the viewer with little discoveries and references to historical image-making along the way. In the end, it's important that the women I depict embody a level of sincerity. If they were presented in another style, you might not quite believe them. The familiar and accessible visual techniques I employ when making my work are necessary to present these women as authentic and powerful.

The Cult of the Green Women, 2022. Digital collage.
Courtesy the artist.

Artist's presentation: Sunday 11 December, 3pm.
Parkin gives an illustrated talk, exploring the cultural influences behind her 'Green Women' series of paintings. Please check website for further details.

Rebecca Parkin (b. 1973, Sheffield, England) received an MA in painting from Royal College of Art, London in 2009. The artist attended the 2020-2021 Turps Off Site Painting programme and was selected for the 2009 and 2021 Bloomberg New Contemporaries. Recent exhibitions include *The Blue*, *The Pink*, *The Immaterial*, *The Void*, Austrain Culturual Forum, London (2022); *Once Upon a Time*, 23-25 Chiltern Street, London (2022); *Electric*, Art Car Boot Fair, London (2022); *Blink*, Safehouse 1, London, (2022).

Zabludowicz Collection Invites is dedicated to solo presentations by UK-based artists who do not currently have representation by a UK commercial gallery.

176 Prince of Wales Road
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Opening times

Thursday–Sunday, 12–6pm

Other times by appointment

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