

Liz Speiser

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2022

# Night Walkers (2021)

Link: <https://vimeo.com/655215710>

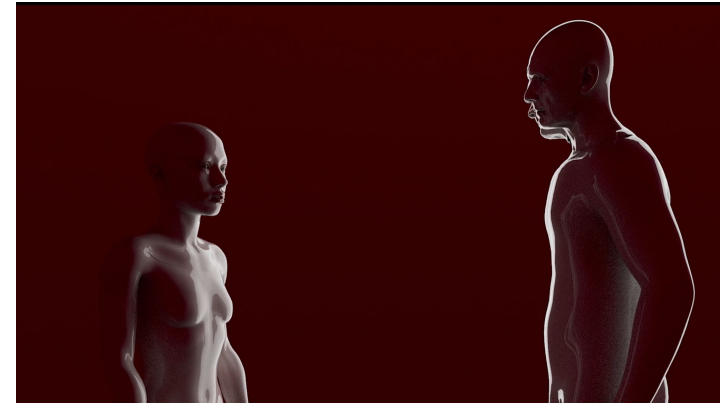
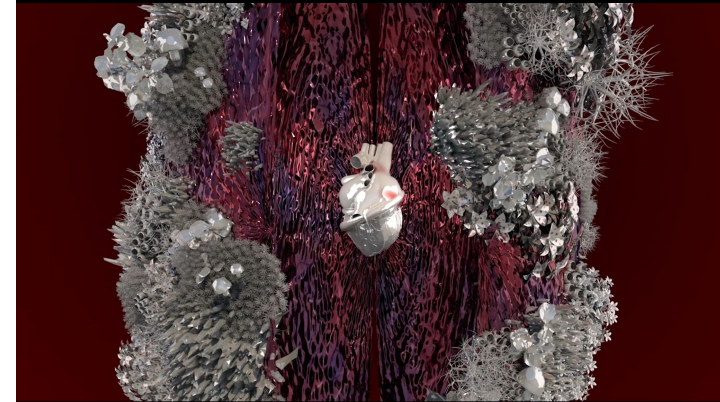
Medium: 3D Animation

“Night Walkers” is a visual interpretation of the many myths surrounding female vampires and female demons, and the cultural impact of these stories on the treatment and perception of women today.

In this piece, which I made using Autodesk Maya software, I was inspired by the stories of Estries from my own Jewish culture. The Estrie, whose name is derived from the French “strix”, meaning “night owl” – which were similar to succubi as being both beautiful and blood-thirsty, favoring babies and young children as prey. It is also said that in order to fly, Estries needed to loosen their hair, so one might keep an Estrie’s hair bound so that she cannot go anywhere without permission. This is also an interesting intersection between beauty and power, especially considering the tradition of shaving one’s hair and/or keeping one’s hair covered in Orthodox sects of the Jewish faith.

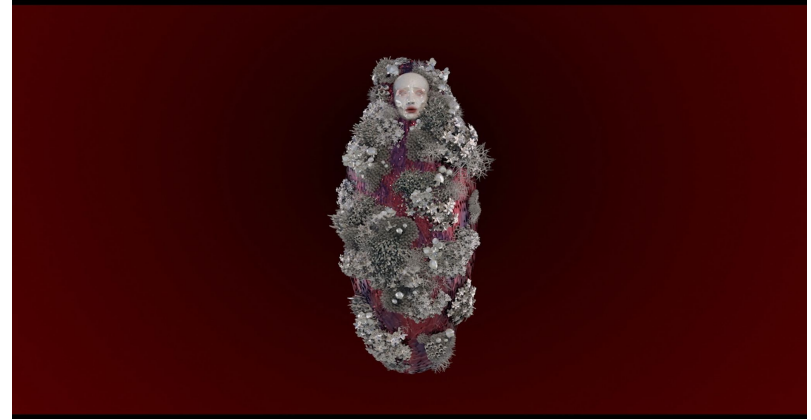
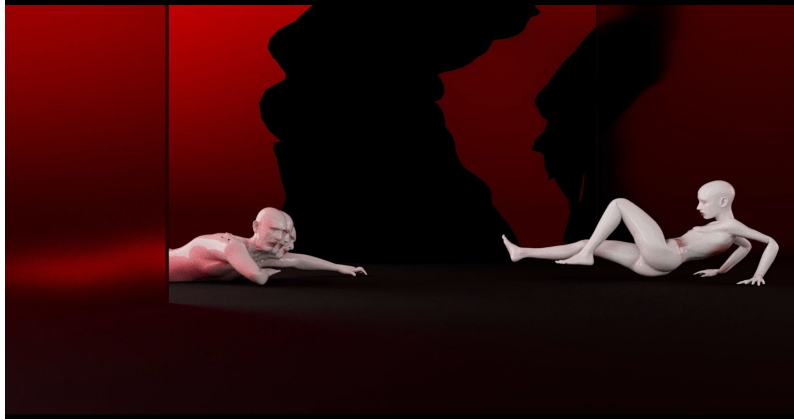
I was especially interested in the duality inherent in the nature of many of these stories. Across cultures many vampiric figures are the original femme fatales, said to beguile men with their looks. In modern media and folk culture, the vampire continues to be highly sexualized and is as much of an object of desire as it is of danger. Overall, the vampire has evolved to become a highly gendered image imbued with male anxieties concerning feminine independence, sexuality, and motherhood. Stories involving female vampires (which in this case can include demons, witches, estries, succubi, and any other form) were and continue to be used as warnings not only to keep children and young men in line, but also young women whose actions could have incredibly harsh consequences.

What threat did a woman pose when she embraced her sexual desires, especially when these were experienced out of wedlock – or for pleasure rather than procreation? The idea that women should be mothers can be further analyzed within the vampire canon, as many stories depict female demons preying on young children rather than being their protectors – succubi were said to kill pregnant women and babies out of jealousy or spite. Where in our collective consciousness does the she-devil live, and what does she mean presently? Can she emerge past her misogynistically-prescribed role as a literal “man-eater” to embody freedom beyond ostracism?



# Night Walkers (2021)

Link: <https://vimeo.com/655215710>



# I Will Meet You on the Other Side of the River (2020)

**Medium:** Digital Photography, Image Transfer on Linen, Plastic Boning

When most people think of death, they might think of grief or mystery – but for many past civilizations, death was not only the beginning of the next journey, but an opportunity to showcase that culture's skills in transforming the fleeting influence of life into objects and stories of permanence. Things like death masks, effigies, written tales, and folk legends have the potential for extending a single soul's mark on the world far beyond the bounds of their life into eternity – as long as humanity's tapestry of memory can last.

*I Will Meet You On the Other Side of the River* is inspired by the original questions: What happens when we die, and how do we immortalize those who are gone? Taking into account centuries of history across several cultures, I decided to make my own death shroud, decorated in imagery that I, and many others, associate with folk stories, warnings, and perhaps a hidden but shared understanding of what happens when we pass on. The process became a meditation, in which I allowed myself to become immersed in the stories, omens, and archetypes that leap the boundaries between many diverse cultures and religions.





# *I Will Meet You on the Other Side of the River (2020)*



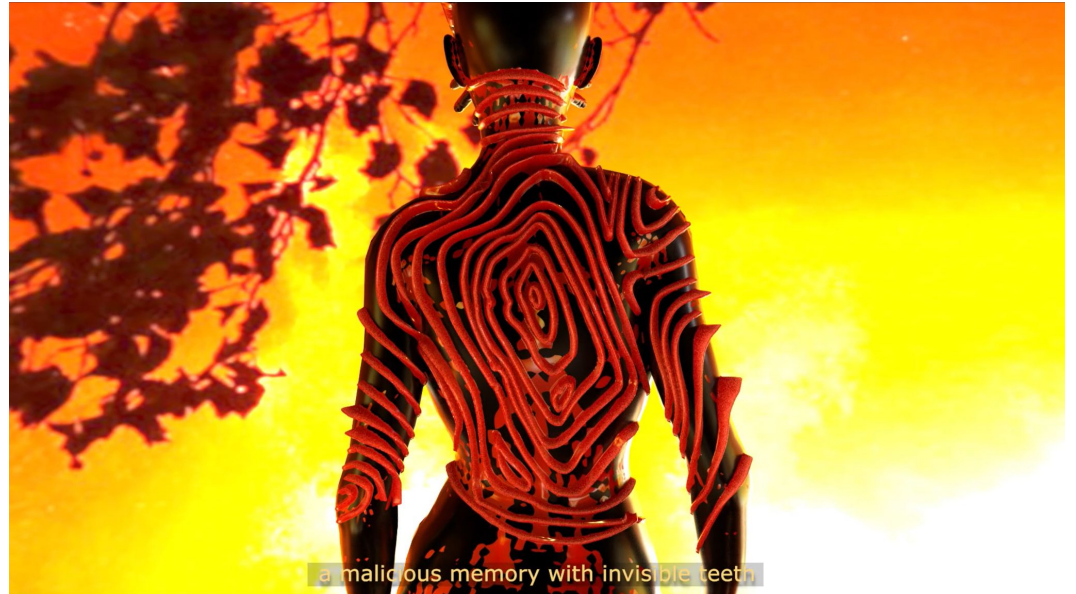
# The Flesh Remembers (2021)

**Medium: 3D Animation**

**Link: <https://vimeo.com/545764525>**

How do past traumas echo across generations? In the past few decades the new field of epigenetics has steadily advanced. This study examines how the blueprint of DNA can be interpreted in vastly different ways depending on the circumstances concerning not only a single person, but also their parents or even grandparents. The adverse effects of genocides, famines, wars, stress, and poor mental health can be passed on from parents to children through the methylation patterns developed during these experiences. If present, methyl groups can essentially turn off a section of DNA, thus creating the potential for an infinite number of different gene expressions for a single individual.

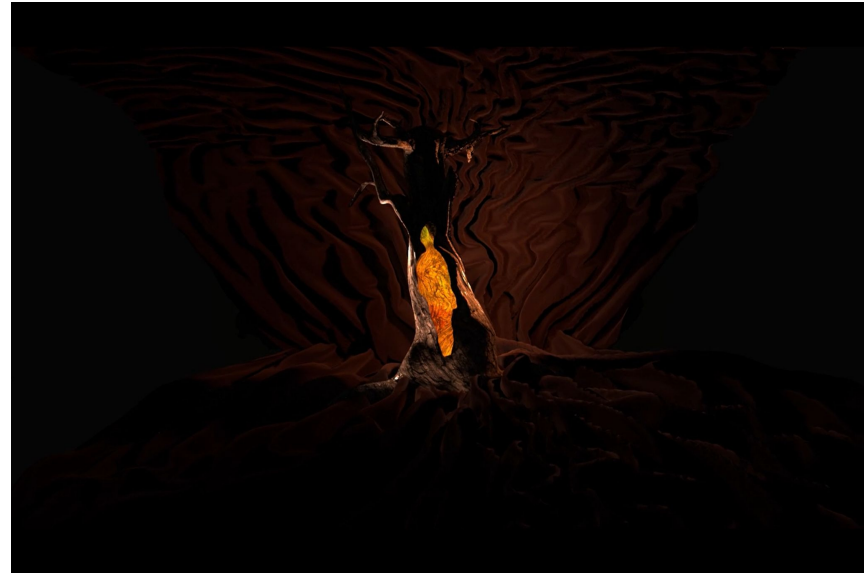
Epigenetics puts the dark sides of inheritance on display, serving as a medium through which violence can haunt us and our children decades after. This genetic scar can tell the stories of the worst humanity has had to endure, even as the world at large seems to forget. With the discovery of epigenetics, we are beginning to scratch the surface of something that was previously more of a cultural or spiritual mind. In other words: The flesh remembers.



a malicious memory with invisible teeth

# The Flesh Remembers (2021)

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# We Pretended to be Witches (2021)

Link to full project: <https://www.lizspeiser.com/we-pretended-to-be-witches-2021>

Medium: Digital Photography, Photoshop, Digital Drawing



This year I turned 21, an age that marks the last milestone into concrete “adulthood,” and I have been overcome with the feeling that I am both young and old, and that I have left my youth behind. Because of this I have been reliving my childhood through memories; these recollections are jumbled and distant, with elements flowing from one story to the next. However, even with my increasing distance from them, each memory remains distinct in feeling if nothing else.

*We Pretended to be Witches* is a collection of work that combines digital drawing and photography to use the body as a topographical canvas on which these childhood memories are projected. Through the use of specific symbolic motifs, the intangible, invisible nature of each story becomes visible as tattoos, which work to show the metaphorical marks of my life experiences in a physical way. I am an amalgamation of all of these little moments -- instances of magical girlhood that have made me into my current self. I owe these memories the respect to record them, document them in tender fondness, while I can still distantly remember them.

After completing each portrait, I wanted to return the images back into the environment from which these memories were cultivated. This is a symbolic return to my childhood both in physical presence in the land of my upbringing, but also in metaphorical return to my childhood in a deep spiritual reflection.



# We Pretended to be Witches (2021)

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Medium: Digital Photography, Photoshop, Digital Drawing



# A New Digital (2021)

**Medium:** Digital Photography, Photoshop, 3D Rendering



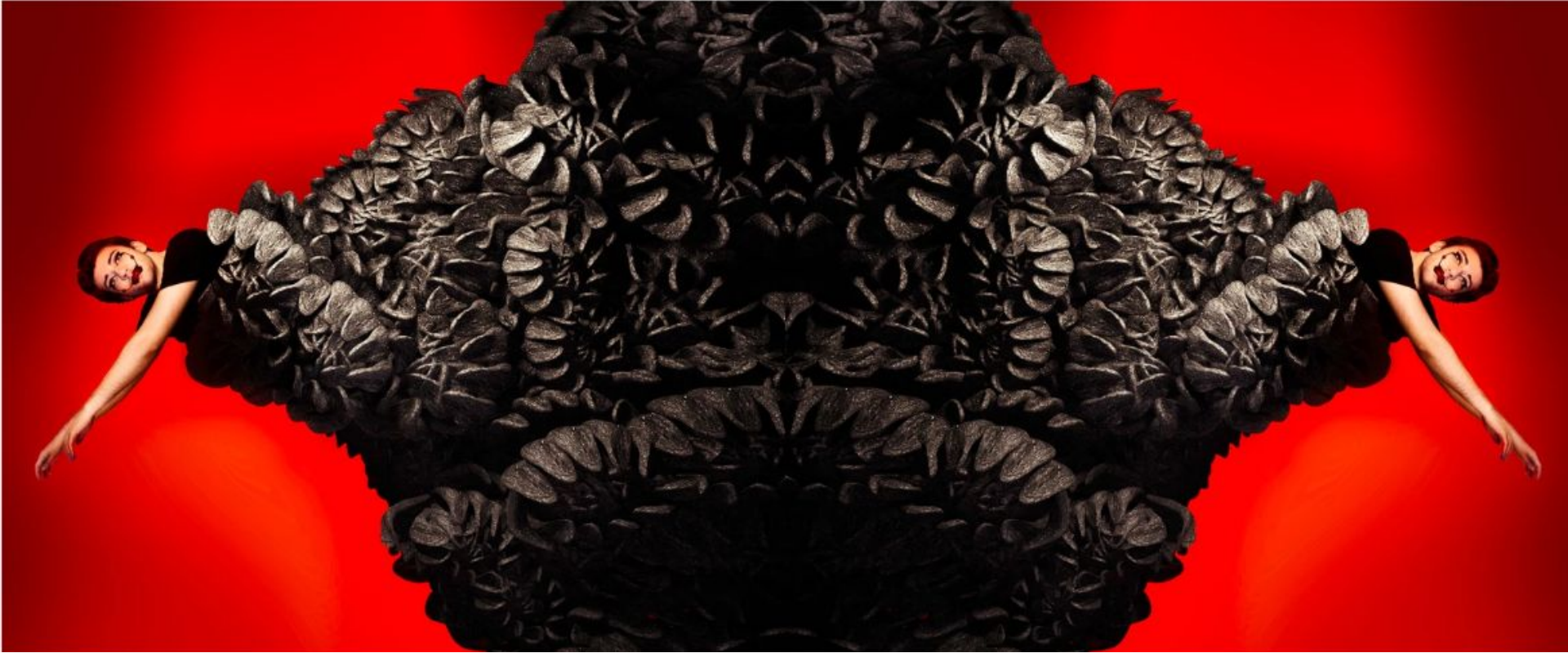
*Liz (2021)*

The year 2020 was universally rife with isolation, fear, and boredom that left many of us with nothing to do but daydream. Escapism has permeated our culture in the forms of fashion, art, music, and mindset; rather than being confined to a cramped apartment our minds can take us to wide-open countrysides, opulent castles, and mysterious alien landscapes. As a photographer who primarily works with portraiture, limiting my practice to protect not only my own health but also the health of my roommates has made this year especially difficult. *A New Digital* is a response to these pandemic-related limitations and their effect on my work.

Throughout this set of fashion portraits I am able to act out elaborate portrait scenes through the use of computer generated graphics mixed with photos of my roommates and myself. In the 3D space, I can make anything I want – any prop, set, or even accessory for no cost and no unnecessary exposure to people outside of my sphere. Not only does this collection of images invite the viewer to engage in conversations about escapism and creativity during a time of isolation, but also to reflect on the future of both the intersection between technology and art, as well as the nature of reality as more lens-based work is seamlessly combined with 3D elements.



# A New Digital (2021)



*Eli* (2021)



# A New Digital (2021)



*Kevin (2021)*

# Sprouting Sea (2022)

Link: <https://vimeo.com/694260040>

Medium: 3D Animation



A personal meditation equating grief to flood.

# Mikveh // Ossuary (2022)

Link: <https://vimeo.com/706416446>

Medium: 3D Animation

*Ossuary // Mikveh* dives into the Jewish tradition of ritual bathing. This 3D animation realizes this custom in four stages: Purification, transformation, marking, and remains. My work explores the implication that with bodily and spiritual cleansing, something is taken away. As one leaves the mikveh, what is purged stays behind to become residue, allowing each bather to leave behind a piece of their body and soul. The mikveh ritual acts as both an agent of catharsis and as a tether which connects each participant to the millions of women who have bathed before them. I consider the mikveh as a symbol of life and death, as an action that both gives and takes from the submerged, and as an opportunity to gain some semblance of immortality.

