Contemporary Visions: Refiguring The Esoteric; The Transformational Act of "Making" Magic

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Abstract
This exploration examines the design and material culture of magical art, ritual practice, and esoteric objects. It includes discussion on the objects of both historical and contemporary folk traditions and occult practices such as votive offerings, building magic, and ritual deposits, and draws on the methodologies of bricolage and heuristic practices as a means of theoretical underpinning. The exploration also considers esoteric objects, artifacts, and folklore practices from Britain and Ireland and then re-examines these practices through the art and design of contemporary makers currently working in the UK. Taking a reflective approach to design history and using first-hand interviews and reflections on the methods of artists such as Lucy Wright, Sally Gilford, and Becky Brewis, this explorative paper will discuss how these modern makers are rethinking occult themes and redesigning esoteric artifacts from a personal and social perspective, whilst working towards a goal of community and connection for both themselves and their audiences.

Keywords: art—crafts—healing—heritage—esoteric—occultism

Occult, objects, and artifacts made with the intention of connecting with the liminal (as well as for other magical or spiritual applications) have appeared historically in varied forms including talismans, charms and amulets, ritual costume, apotropaic [evil-averting] mark making, and spirit paintings; these have been used by people over history in a variety of different ways. Practices range from concealing objects to displaying talismans such as horseshoes or alchemic sigils [magical symbols] in the home, wearing spell bags or charms sewn into clothing, or leaving ritual deposits in sacred landscapes. Magical making can often mean improvising from the materials available to hand, especially those found in nature, and can be considered an esoteric form of *bricolage*. A process outlined by Lévi-Strauss and that links well with the concepts of magical making, "bricolage" describes acts of novel creating that are rooted in established mythological patterns of making, but that have the ability to shift and metamorphose to suit meaning/place or time.[1] Whether made from the nature around us, commissioned from a folk healer or artist, or fashioned by an alchemist and designed based around the planets or changing seasons, humans have connected and symbolically engaged with a range of liminal objects to walk the boundaries and thresholds between magic and reality, seeking protection from malign forces, healing via sympathetic magic, or connecting with ancestors or spirits.

Today there is an emerging interest in occult and the revival of folklorist practices among contemporary artists, academics, and indeed in the wider public, with recent exhibitions in the UK including: *Making More Mischief: Folk Costume in Britain*, London, 2024; *The Horror Show*, London, 2023; *Ritual Britain*, Ben Edge, London,

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2021; *Not Without My Ghosts*, Millennium Gallery, Sheffield, 2020, and conferences such as "Therapeutic Landscapes – Ritual, Folklore and Wellbeing," Worcester, 2024, and the Magickal Women's Conference, Birmingham, 2024. Each of these showcased the art, design, practice, community work, and research of contemporary makers and academics whose work centers around the reimagining and continuing relevance of esoteric practice and folkloric action both on a personal and communal level. This article will explore some of the historical and folkloric relationships around occult beliefs and designed objects that I have encountered through my research, and it will also explore the notion of creativity as an act of ritual in itself, both spiritually and magically. Discussions around "design" will reference works that have been created, embellished, or shaped for an intended functionality but that also have a magical, spiritual, or folkloric use or intent. Using historical and contemporary sources as well as case studies of current artists Lucy Wright, Becky Brewis and Sally Gilford, and my own art practice, I will show how magical objects, artifacts, and folkloric creations are still very much relevant and enlivened today.

The art of healing

My Doctoral thesis "The Art of Healing – Symbolic Objects and Transformational Making: Making, Creating and Assembling in Spiritual, Creative and Magical Healing Practice," aims to examine two questions: How are modern practitioners, including artists, designers, and healers, reimagining and reinterpreting healing artifacts and ritual through art/cultural processes? and, Can magical/spiritual/faith artworks or objects play a part in transformation or healing through symbolic engagement? I collected evidence of their historical use and meaning, and then comparatively explored their contemporary use, materiality, and design through field visits, public surveys, workshops, gallery exhibitions, and case studies with working healers and creatives.

This work explored ideas around the practices of making and materiality through the lens of bricolage by reimagining and reinterpreting healing and ritual as syncretic assemblages and intercultural processes, and via the framework of the heuristic inquiry. "Heuristic enquiry involves exploring the subjective experience or a particular phenomenon within a purposeful sample of individuals. Heuristic researchers do not separate the individual from the experience but rather focus their exploration on the essential nature of the relationship or interaction between both."[2] A heuristic framework evidences the subjective experience of magical, spiritual, and faith objects in everyday life and practice, and enables me to explore my own belief system and making and designing objects and artifacts in response to personal experiences of the phenomena in question. Mike Arons and Ruth Richards tell us, "Creativity involves both originality and meaningfulness" and recommend that we use creativity as a tool for connecting with the research experience, suggesting that "making" is a purposeful practice in occult and creative domains and can be used as a means of "coming to know."[3]

The case studies discussed in this paper were conducted with artists creatives whose holistic or artistic outcomes are a response to magical or ritual practice, or esoteric or folkloric themes. These case studies enabled me to explore and compare how artists and makers engage with these themes, often in social action and community-based projects. Using myself as a case study as part of the heuristic practice, I recorded the process, design, and outcomes of my recent exhibited work "Ask the Goddess" (2023) in which I investigated the potential for symbolic engagement with esoteric artwork within the environment of a public exhibition. The work, created through explorations

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of my own trauma and healing, raised questions about the positive or emotive effect they had on others.

The exhibited work comprised of three ceramic Goddess sculptures on plinths set up to create a temporary shrine in the gallery space, put together by art collective "The Shooting Gallery Collective" (Hitchin, 14–30 September 2023). Visitors were invited to come and choose a deity and leave a ritual deposit in the form of an anonymous "votive" note with a pin pushed through the paper. Created as a response to historical Goddesses such as Aphrodite and Athena who were worshipped for their realms of influence such as protection, love, or wisdom, I wanted to explore what kind of Goddesses would be helpful to people now, considering modern ideas around mental health and emotional wellbeing. The Goddesses I designed were entitled, "The Goddess of Self Love", "The Goddess of Owning Your Scars", and the "Goddess of Strange Comforts", hand built with buff and porcelain clay and embellished with found and collected objects such as coins, old nails, crystals, and slate. I was interested to see whether the individual votive requests left by specific sculptures would be connected to some wider more common set of emotional needs or life goals and if the work would be interacted with by a wide variety of different people.

Over two weeks, 580 offerings were left at the gallery shrine, and it was evident from observations of the diverse actors who interacted with the work, and from reading their very personal written responses, that many people had connected both emotionally and symbolically with the work (**Figure 1**). After the exhibition, the "votive" notes were scanned and the images used to create a pattern design that was printed onto fabric with the idea to make a wearable cloak for a future exhibition. Four new ceramic Goddesses were created that reflected the overarching themes of the wishes of the participating audience: love and relationships; bodily and mental health; money and success; and future hopes. The paper votives were fired into the new Goddesses in the initial bisque firing and the ashes from the kiln were mixed into glazes to be used on the works during the second stoneware firing process. This ritually imbued the new Goddess sculptures with the wishes and energy of the participating audience's votives.

The collected nails, remaining paper votives and left-over ashes were saved and fired into a ceramic ritual urn to be used at subsequent exhibitions to collect new votive offerings from a new audience (**Figure 2**). Consequently, the new ceramic works came into being as an act of ritual and magical bricolage, where the materials utilized included the paraphernalia, detritus, and paper offerings collected from the exhibition. The idea was to perpetuate work that continually evolves in a cyclical process of making and audience participation. This public participation both informs the work and imbues it with meaning and power, with the hope that those who engage with it get something positive from that interaction on a personal individual level, but also on a communal/social level as they interact with the work alongside friends, family, and strangers.

Concepts of occult practice, creative making, and discovery such as the work I have been exploring tie into an emerging contribution to knowledge in the UK around contemporary spirituality, engagement, and action, which is more than just art or design. It is research aiming to tap into the ways in which spirituality, magic, and a Pagan revival are drawing people to revisit esoteric traditions imagined from a new perspective and for a modern society, possibly as a means to reconnect with ourselves and our communities in a fast-paced and technological world. As Alfred Gell suggests, "The work of art is inherently social in a way in which the merely beautiful or mysterious object is not: It is a physical entity which mediates between two beings, and therefore creates a social

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Figure 1 *Ask the Goddess* (2023), Sarah Bellisario—photo credit 'Shooting Gallery Collective.'

relation between them, which in turn provides a channel for further social relations and influences."[4] Academic discussions and new emerging cultural traditions with a focus on historical esoteric and seasonal practices are allowing fresh audiences to connect with new communities and experience social opportunities they may previously not have been able to be part of. This reimagining of the magical for contemporary audiences in turn further fuels a revival of the use of magical objects such as crystals, tarot, talismans, and other occult ephemera as part of everyday personal ritual within the public, who are both using and designing their own reimagined magical objects.

Folklore reimagined

Artist Lucy Wright is taking folkloric traditions—in her case morris dancing, a traditional English folk dance—and weaving new customs into the expanding tapestry of

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Figure 2 *Wishes Urn* (2023), front and back, Sarah Bellisario.

traditional folklore practice. Using the term "hedge morris dancing" to describe her new type of morris performances that take place outside of an established morris team, while drawing on a wide range of historical and present-day influences, she designs costumes and gentle invitations for others to join her in reimagining historical folk arts and practices. Her aim is to make folk more inclusive, more accessible, and less gate-kept by those who have historically dominated the conversation about the nature of folk and tradition. In discussion, she has said:

> I'm interested in seasonal customs, and they often have a strong material culture aspect. Something I've always felt defines folk is its materiality, its material practices. It's the culture we create for ourselves, often very literally. And since folklore usually takes place outside of institutions, the kind of objects and costuming you might encounter can't usually be bought, ready-made, from a shop: so folk relies on the practitioner making something unique for themselves.[5]

Discussing the costumes she has created for her most recent project *Dusking,* in which she dances the sundown at sunset on October 31st—in counterpoint to the morris dancing that customarily takes place on the morning of May 1st—she told me: "back in the day, folk costumes were often quite piecemeal. They were fairly simple, using whatever materials were most readily available, because people

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didn't have a lot of money. Sometimes it would just be the clothes that they wore for church with a few extra flourishes—flowers or crepe paper decorations—and in some mummers plays, the actors would literally just turn their jacket inside out and that would be the costume." In response to this, Wright explains, "I started playing with this idea in my work, challenging myself with the conceit to make whatever I could from what I had lying around or by just collecting stuff within walking distance of where I live."[6]

To this end, Wright delights in sourcing materials from shops that cross cultural and social boundaries and creating costumes inspired by the traditional while also celebrating the new, she says:

> I use a lot of holographic Lycra and foiled fabrics, very palpably man-made, often rather garish materials, and consciously I'm trying to make use of stuff which screams modernity to create that kind of juxtaposition because it is still an unexpected one. There's a tendency to believe that folk has to look a particular way—rustic, a little "old-fashioned"—and if it doesn't then it can't be authentic. That's the opposite of my view. So I'm always trying to play with that tension, and material choice is a massive part of that.[7]

Coming from a family of morris dancers and having also performed with BBC Folk Award-nominated act Pilgrims' Way in the 2010s, Wright is genuinely passionate and respectful of traditional folk practices but is also driven to push the boundaries of how these traditions might be adapted for our modern world. This desire to embrace the modern and challenge customary ideas around folkloric expression also influences the sites she chooses to set her performances in. "I tend to gravitate towards places that are unloved," she explains. "Like, edgelands, you know, places that are unused, or even places that might be more like Marc Augé's Non-places. I haven't done it yet, but I would love to dance in a supermarket, and I've often done stuff in car parks. So, the 'hedge' in my 'hedge morris dancing' is not a literal hedge, but it might be a sort of liminal space within the modern urban landscape" (**Figure 3**). And I think it is this desire to reallow traditional practices to change and adapt for the times, as they historically used to, that has made her "hedge morris" so popular with a growing younger audience.

Designed with magic in mind

In many traditions, occult rituals and magical practice are combined with specifically designed symbolic ephemera that are made and used for the purposes of making magic. Many practitioners such as shamans, energy healers, and those who subscribe to witchcraft (in its many forms) both create and use magical objects as vessels to symbolically or otherwise contain, carry, or transfer energy. According to UK National Health Service guidance on Energy Therapies such as Qi Gong, Reiki, and Therapeutic touch, "Everything is made up of energy, and every living thing has an energy field." In complementary alternative medicine energy healing, the therapist can "channel positive energy to the recipient in order to help the person's system balance itself."[8] In faith, spiritual, and occult practices, makers must consider how the objects and artifacts they design can be charged with personal power or energy to trap, manifest, protect, hold, prevent, cure, heal, repel, as well as how the maker of the object/or the user might imbue their own energetic power into the object to make it work. It is worth noting that the perceived "power" or "energy" of an object might come from

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Figure 3 *Untitled Hedge Morris Dancing, Micklefield* (2024), Lucy Wright. Photo credit: Leonie Freeman.

different sources or be interpreted in different ways depending on the personal practice or beliefs of the individual designing or using the object.

Sometimes this power comes from the object's representational meaning, and belief in that symbolic representation can be the very thing that then gives the object its so-called power. This can be evidenced in luck charms or religious votives and talismans such as a cross or a St. Christopher pendant. Fiona Souter, Chaplain at the University of Hertfordshire, told me:

> Many Christians wear St. Christopher's to protect them while they're travelling. It's the real sense of protection that comes from it, and lots of churches still have votive stands where you can go and light a candle and say a prayer. Is it the candle itself that's important? Is it the act of praying? I don't know; it's one of those things that's sort of symbiotic.[9]

In other examples, the environment the object is created in, worked with or taken from might give it energy, and a practitioner might feel they are taking away something numinous or powerful from a place where they had felt and engaged in magic or spirituality.

Alternatively, it may be the very act of designing and making the object and the considerations of its form, decoration, and materials that comprise it that enliven and empower it. It is a marriage of art and meaning but with the purpose of magical function. Symbolic and ritual occult artifacts help people to connect with the magic they aim to undertake, and the art of making can be a symbolic and transformational ritual in itself. Gell explains, "It is the way an art object is construed as having come into the world which is the source of the power such objects have over us—their becoming rather than their being."[10] The choice of materials, symbols used,

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elements called on, and time used or taken in the making as well as the intention and state of mind of the maker are what makes the object "magical." "Even the design process itself can be seen as somewhat of a thaumaturgic practice: objects, materials, and images are symbolic substitutes for people, places and ideas, and can be used to conjure up emotions and stir the imagination in a form of sympathetic magic."[11] Designing a spell or creating a physical magical artifact may mean prescribing to a set of occult rules or may be an intuitive process tailor-made for a particular meaning or person and created using relevant symbolic images in mind. The shape of designed magical objects and the materials used often mirror the action that the object is meant to achieve—a poppet [small effigy used for bewitchment] or an animal heart stuck through with pins for a curse, or a wax or tin votive charm shaped into a body part for protection or healing wish. Design assists users to engage with supposed magical properties.

Designed objects also have the potential to be imbued with energy or power by the creator in the act of making, and the material it is constructed of—be it metal, parchment, or clay—acts as a conduit for containing this magical intention or energy. This ineffable energy then has the potential to be passed on to the person who commissions or procures the object either knowingly or unknowingly, thus the imbued object could be seen to continue to have an emotional life after it has left its maker. It is important when discussing this sort of *power* or *energy* to acknowledge the anti-empirical nature of magical thinking and its resistance to fixed or rational readings of experience. The creativity discussed in this article is often about giving form and material to things which are inherently formless, immaterial, and unknowable such as emotions or intentions (e.g., healing or protection). As such, the magical thinking involved in the making of the works should be looked at through the lens of the individual beliefs systems of each designer, artist, or maker and with a non-empirical gaze. "Magical thinking is emotional: we think magically in response to desire, fear, guilt, anxiety and joy, but also, and perhaps most fiercely, to love and hate."[12] These emotions can be infused into the magic we weave and the art objects we make. We put parts of ourselves into our rituals and spells, sometimes using representations of our body parts in the form of votives to create sympathetic forms of magic for both ourselves and others. Dimitris Xygalatas sums up this notion of the human ritualistic inclination: "Ceremony is the primordial part of human nature, one that helps us connect, find meaning and discover who we are. We are a ritual species."[13]

Old gods, new offerings: Becky Brewis

Votives—objects offered in fulfillment of a vow—have been used historically to solicit help and intervention for ill health or to give thanks for safe passage from danger. Though they have ancient origins, they are still used in many cultures today, especially in the Mediterranean, South America, and the Middle East. "In Eastern cultures these offerings are generally made to gain favour with supernatural forces in anticipation of the granting of a particular wish, but in Western cultures an ex-voto expresses gratitude to the divinity for a miracle that has already occurred."[14] Although votive objects appear in both Pagan and Catholic practices, their meanings, symbolism, and application will vary hugely depending on the belief system of the person engaging with them. Traditionally, votives used as offerings to saints or deities are made from materials such as textiles, clay, wax, metal, or paper, although sometimes they may appear in the form of a meaningful personal item. Those fashioned in the shape of body parts may be comprised of wax or pressed into metal such as silver, gold, or tin. If they are small enough, they can be sewn into clothing

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to be carried on your person and are often bought with a particular personal purpose in mind.

Artist Becky Brewis has explored ideas around votive offerings in her work from a historical and folklore perspective. "My own work explores images as material objects under pressure, i.e., I try to make pieces which, in their sensory fullness and factual slipperiness, are true to the acts of creating autobiography and of remembering."[15] In her work *Gifts for Gods* commissioned for the Volk Gallery in Dundee in 2022, she explores the ancient practice of making and exchanging "anatomical votives," and using terracotta clay, produced an edition of fifty votives depicting hands, wombs, eyes and ears (**Figure 4**). A repurposed nappy vending machine was hung in a shopping center in Dundee as an interactive art installation from which the public were invited to purchase a votive from the machine for three pounds each. As the votives were dispensed, visitors were encouraged to make a wish that resonated with the project's ideas around offerings and exchange and as such reenact this pre-Christian tradition in a contemporary setting.

So how does considering the "design" of magical or votive objects help us more effectively understand them, or indeed how might these conceptions shape our ideas about design? Brewis explains that her interest in votives comes from the way they connect with people both literally and figuratively: "They are images that look like body parts and which are conceptually connected to the human body too. Ancient Greek and Roman anatomical votives were left to the gods as offerings at sites of healing. I am interested in how they occupy this intersection between belief, the body and site-specificity."[16] This connectivity is mirrored in her other artworks *Three Votive Wombs Based on original Roman Anatomical Votives in the Wellcome Collection* (2020), which were, in her own words, situated within the context of "material artifacts re-activated in the present."[17] This can also be seen in her work *Quilted Votives* (2020) depicting ancient Greek and Roman imagery, and of which she says: "There is something quotidian and domestic about ancient Greek and Roman anatomical votives, in the same way that there is about quilting and embroidery."[18]

As well as drawing on ideas around votives and healing from a historical standpoint, Brewis has also explored the folklore and healing traditions of pre-Christian holy wells—known as Clootie wells—and Rag trees in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Rag trees—also known as Clootie trees—were often found next to Clootie wells, and ritual tokens in the form of rags were tied to the branches. Magical thinking is central to this custom and is discussed by Ceri Houlbrook in the accompanying book for the 2019 *Spellbound* exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum. Houlbrook tells us the rags tied to the tree can be seen "as votive offerings, left in gratitude to the spirit or saint of the well for a cure effected or good fortune come to pass. Another interpretation focuses on 'sympathetic magic' – the idea that a piece of clothing was intrinsically linked to its wearer and had absorbed any illness from which its wearer might be suffering."[19] This shedding of the sickness onto the garment, to which the illness was now sympathetically tied, was thought more effective as a cure if it could be transferred to another living thing, which in this case would be the Rag tree.

In 2022, Brewis created a series of works for Hospitalfield House, Angus, as lead artist for their Young Artist program, and this saw her working with a targeted group of young people over twenty weeks. Over this time, they drew inspiration through explorations of the house's history and collections, concluding the project with an exhibition that ran across both the grounds and historic rooms. One aspect of this final exhibition

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Figure 4 *Gifts for Gods, a series of 50 terracotta anatomical votives* (2022), Becky Brewis.

was the *Clootie Well* (**Figure 5**). This excerpt from the 2022 exhibition catalog explains the mission and purpose of this artwork:

> Clootie Well for Hospitalfield reimagines the fernery as a centre for pilgrimage and healing. A site-specific collaborative weaving will link Hospitalfield's early history, as a hospital for pilgrims travelling to Arbroath Abbey, with the pre-Christian tradition of Clootie Wells. These were holy wells associated with healing, where pilgrims would dip strips of cloth in the water before tying them to trees as part of a wishing ritual. Ferns are ancient plants and have long been associated with sacredness. Visitors can add their own ribbon to the Young Artists' installation and make a wish.[20]

As evidenced in her previous work with votives, Brewis again invited the public to participate in the artwork, allowing them to imbue the installation with their own meaning and symbolism, and therefore enabling them to attach their own meaning and healing significance to the work. Gavin Delahunty considers this symbolic interplay between a work of art and its audience, "whereby each viewer's intimate engagement with the work releases their own unconscious feelings, desires and memories, creating a

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Figure 5 *Clootie well' at Hospitalfield, Angus* (2022), Becky Brewis.

space where the external object interacts with the internal thoughts and emotions of the viewer."[21] In both forms of "offerings"—the vow made through the anatomical votive and the act of rag tying on Clootie trees—we can identify the use of sympathetic magic as a means to transfer, release, let go, or heal, physically, mentally, or spiritually. Sympathetic magic, according to James Frazer, has two main rules: "First,

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that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed."[22] Clootie trees can still be found near holy wells and at sacred sites in some parts of the country, still added to by passing visitors although possibly not always with the same historical intention. In some cases, such as the one I came across at the Rollright Stones, the original Clootie tree has metamorphosed into something rather more magical than folkloric, and spell bags, ritual deposits, and other assorted magical paraphernalia are hung like an improvised art installation in its branches (**Figure 6**). The Pagan revival and the renewed desire by more people to leave ritual deposits in the landscape, often not degradable materials, is sparking a whole new conversation about the environmental impact of these kinds of offerings. Although we as humans seem compelled to honor and ritualize the landscape, we need to find ways to do so that protect and prolong the beauty and nature of these spaces.

Crafting protection: Sally Gilford

Building magic can pertain to the act or use of concealing, burying, or displaying objects or artifacts in or around a building to facilitate the protection and safety of those who use the building as well as the structure itself. These objects have in the past included:

Old clothes, shoes, bones, desiccated animals, money, figurines, bottles, playing cards, books, newspapers, old documents, knives, horseshoes, animal hearts, holed stones, bits of old iron, and prehistoric stone tools have all been found over the centuries. Some were intended to be recovered by their concealers, some were left for posterity, some were never intended to be revealed again, and some were merely accidental losses.[23]

These objects and artifacts, placed in a variety of different areas around a building including in and around windows, doors and fireplaces, under hearths and entrances, up chimneys, and in roofs, would have been used to protect against bad luck, fire, malevolent spirits, and demons, fairies, witches, and nightmares.

Building and protection magic can be found in cultures as far back as AD 650, for example in the use of Aramaic Incantation Bowls created to protect the home by warding off demons, witches, and unfortunate mishaps. These bowls would have been inscribed with magical formulas and incantations and buried—often buried upside-down—under the hearth or at individual entrances within the home. "The bowls contain incantations of varying sizes, composed in a number of different Eastern Aramaic dialects, such as Syriac and Mandaic, but the majority are in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic."[24] One creative who is currently exploring the idea of building magic, protection, and concealed objects is Sally Gilford in her current heritage commission for Islington Mill in Salford where she has been a resident artist for fourteen years. Gilford was commissioned to design a piece of work that celebrates the heritage of the building as it undergoes full restoration work. A gazetteer was put together by Islington Mill's heritage group, of around 500 items of significance from the former textile mill, and Gilford was commissioned to make a response to ten of these items exploring both its history and former residents.[25]

Working with Manchester historian Mark Chalmer, and inspired by her interest in building magic and protection, Gilford explains:

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Figure 6 Magical 'Clootie' tree, Rollright Stones (2024). Photo credit: Sarah Bellisario.

Seeing this change and transformation of the space I started to think about how we can use objects to remember spaces when they're changing, how do you protect spaces and how could I explore ideas around superstition? So, I wanted to make these kind of amulets and charms and that's when I started to look into the 3D printing of these objects, in order to really abstract them from being just architectural practical forms to these almost kind of precious things that people would use to look at the protection and preservation of the building.[26]

As she is interested in the materiality and design of the building, some objects have been directly cast from the building itself using silicon molds, the most intriguing being a cross of hammered-in nails found hidden high on the wall of the old textile factory floor. As well as the amulet series (**Figure 7**), she also aimed to create a protective suit of armor for the building using fabric screen printed with images of the building's amulets. Gilford said:

> I want to think about protecting the future of the building, but also I want to reference the textile heritage of the place so I'm going to use calico to make a suit of armour, so it's going to be a fabric suit of armour but I want to look at also the work wear that the factory workers would wear and include that as well.[27]

After the exhibition, at the completion of the restoration, these concealed or apotropaic art objects will become a tangible part of the history of the new refurbished

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Figure 7 *3D scans of amulets,* Sally Gilford 2024—From the exhibition *'To Be Held.'*

building, eternally bound up with the past of the factory workers who first inhabited the space and its current twenty-first century occupants. Siân Lincoln argues that buildings "can be understood as material spaces in which historical trails are left all over the place. The concealed object is one such historical trail."[28] These magically designed objects will not only act as a celebration of the building's past life, but will serve as an ongoing means of imbuing the building itself with protection magic to bring luck and protection to the structure and its inhabitants well into the future. And, as suggested by Houlbrook and Davies, when considering concealed objects and building magic, these could possibly be viewed as a sort of apotropaic time capsule: "Some objects deliberately placed under buildings and in their fabric were physical expressions of their concealers' sentiments and messages for posterity', in other words, they acted as personal time capsules."[29]

Conclusion

Design for the purpose of magical or folkloric action varies greatly in its use of materials and can take on diverse forms. These range from personally crafted costumes to totemic body parts, and from bricolaged makings formed from natural objects to arcane artifacts forged from metals under an astrological sign and decorated with sigils. But in whatever way they are fashioned, their conceived power comes from the way in which they come into being and their relationship with their intended user. Sometimes these objects are designed by those seeking to connect on a solitary level, while alternatively they may be created to connect communities through group ritual or to socially engage an audience in a gallery space.

The creatives this paper has explored all hope their work has the potential to give something back to their communities; both on a human and spiritual level, their work carries

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a common thread of connection, ritual, and symbolic engagement found through their explorations. They weave their personal experiences, ideas around heritage, historical research, and their own individual connections with the esoteric together to reinvent and reimagine new ways of seeing, using their design, ritual practice, and symbolic art making, research, and social engagement to help both themselves and their audiences find connection to each other and the world around them in meaningful ways.

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