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Frances F. Denny—Spellwork

November 9–December 23, 2023

CLAMP is pleased to present "Spellwork," an exhibition of still life photographs by Frances F. Denny inspired by the occult, motherhood, and the medium of photography. "Spellwork" is the artist's fourth solo exhibition with CLAMP.

What is magic? In contemporary witchcraft circles, the notion of magic is seen as a practiced shift in consciousness. Though it is uncanny, magic is not supernatural. It is rooted in the mind—and in the earth. And photography itself is magical—a singular alchemy of vision, light, and glass.

On the heels of the Denny's successful series "Major Arcana: Portraits of Witches in America," she gave birth to her first child. "Spellwork" represents a rumination on the experience of childbirth and motherhood and comments upon the unique dynamic between a mother and her child.

The images in "Spellwork" are constructed in the studio using plants and flowers as well as personal items gathered from the artist's home that together conjure a sense of collaborative, childlike play. Some of the plant materials were sourced from the artist's backyard with others from grocery stores or specialty flower markets. All were chosen for their formal properties or symbolic resonance.

Each photograph features a flower invoking birth, fragility, and mortality, alongside a child's symbolic "interruption." Many images include a "magical" photographic shift (smoke, filters, blur, rainbows, refraction, spectral stars) and a plastic material representing a shield for the preservation of the self (often a container for a child's mess). In the images the studio set becomes an altar; the act of creation is an incantation.

Together the images introduce a subjective duality of both artist and mother—the triumphant, deathly dance of those two roles, merging into one. The titles reference phrases from rituals and spells in *The Spiral Dance* by Starhawk.



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Frances F. Denny is a photo-based artist, editorial photographer, and screenwriter whose work investigates female identities. She is the author of two books of photography, *Let Virtue Be Your Guide* (2016) and *Major Arcana: Portraits of Witches in America* (2020). Photographs from *Major Arcana* have been exhibited at The Peabody Essex Museum, The New-York Historical Society, and The Southeast Museum of Photography. Frances is the recipient of a NYFA's 2016 Fellowship in Photography, and has won numerous awards, including Photo District News "Top 30."

Denny received an MFA from Rhode Island School of Design and a BA from NYU's Gallatin School. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal Magazine*, *Harper's BAZAAR*, *Vanity Fair*, *ELLE*, *Architectural Digest*, *British Vogue*, among many others.

Denny lives and works in New York.

Image: © Frances F. Denny; "Dark memories of whence She came (Hellebore, Anemone, Fritillaria)," 2023; Archival pigment print.