

Alexandra Midal

Witches of Design

Ann Lee: Design, Trance and Feminism

mudac Editions RADDAR

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The collection RADDAR releases a bold third issue: *Witches of Design: Design, Trance and Feminism*. This new volume explores the encounter between design and the subversive figure of the witch—the one who refuses domestic, sexual, or social assignments in order to claim her autonomy.

Drawing on the story of Ann Lee, founder in 1774 of the egalitarian Shaker sect, *Witches of Design* brings together Shaker design - famous for its rocking chairs, flat brooms, and other iconic objects - with the rebellious figure of the witch. In 1837, ecstatic trances disrupted the established order of rituals, and the sect entered what became known as the “Era of Manifestations.”

Animated by the spirit of Ann Lee, a group of unruly sisters begin to vibrate, whirl, and repurpose objects of design in order to reclaim the freedom that had been insidiously taken from them over the decades. The result is a narrative in which the history of design intertwines with insubordination, trance, and the creative power of women.

Witches of Design explores the fascinating figure of Ann Lee, founder of the Shakers, at a moment when *The Testament of Ann Lee* by Mona Fastvold is arriving in theaters and reviving the full power of this contemporary myth.

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Ann Lee: Design, Trance and Feminism

About the author

A professor of art and design history and theory at HEAD – Genève/ HES-SO, Alexandra Midal is a practicing artist and independent curator whose research into visual culture translates into works, exhibitions, books and films. Her publications to date include *Do You Speak Flower?* (Les Presses du réel, 2025), *The Murder Factory* (Les Presses du réel, 2023), *Design. Introduction à l'histoire d'une discipline* (Pocket, 2009) and *Antidesign* (Épithème, 2003). For several years, she has been exploring Shaker design through installations (Centre européen d'actions artistiques contemporaines, Strasbourg, 2022-23) and films.



Alexandra Midal, *Shake, Shake, Shakers*, 2022

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Launched by mudac – the Museum of Contemporary Design and Applied Arts in Lausanne – RADDAR is a series of texts dedicated to design research. RADDAR will appeal to anyone interested in objects, spaces, architecture, graphics and visual forms, including their representation, circulation, history, technical evolution, significance and material make-up.

Scholarly and provocative, poetic and disruptive, RADDAR presents new interpretations of the defining role of design in today's culture. Outstanding as well as young and unexpected voices from all fields of design meet those from the social and cultural sciences, art, science, literature and beyond. A space for dialogue, criticism, discussion, speculation and surprise, RADDAR aims to point its antennae at the various complex issues of design, revealing the semantic, visual and aesthetic richness of this field as well as its social, political and economic dimensions.

The first two titles in the RADDAR collection, *The Kitchen Where function meets pleasure* and *Bathroom From hygiene to wellness*, written by Jolanthe Kugler, explore the historical and societal dimensions of the emblematic objects in these two rooms. These texts are adapted from a series of lectures on the theme of the home held at mudac from October to December 2022.

An architect, urban planner and design historian, Jolanthe Kugler is chief curator and exhibition commissioner at mudac, co-director of the RADDAR programme at mudac and a professor at the Politecnico di Milano - Scuola di design in Milan.



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