

LAURA GRAHAM

J
A
M
E
S

SOUL MURDER VI

I am interested in justice, the interface between constraining systems, people and the misuse of these systems and media. It has been said that we ignore history at our peril and yet there are areas of history so unpalatable that community memory baulks at their revisiting. The witch trials in Scotland are one such example.

This exhibition is the final piece in a series of work that began in 2009.

Almost like a wave, the work has reappeared at certain points in response to contemporary events, alerts on twitter and google concerning burnings and deaths across the world. Then in 2020, just before lockdown, I was introduced to Claire Mitchell QC, who was pushing for a pardon for the women, and some men, accused of witchcraft in Scotland. I was invited on to the Witches of Scotland Podcast and it became clear that I had to complete this work by restaging the art event in the center of Edinburgh, on Calton Hill at dawn on International Woman's Day, Tuesday 8th March 2022.

The hill stands just above Holyrood, the palace of JAMES VI of Scotland, driving force and originator of Daemonologie, a book that laid out what it was, and meant to society, to be a witch.

So began the five great Scottish Witch panics.

In this work I consider cross -cultural historical and contemporary issues surrounding gender, law, religion, social mores and identification – and by questioning

assumptions and controls I merge together motifs and questions about what was, and who were being persecuted.

1

The past of the witch trials is bound up with Calvinism, religious repression, and gendered persecution. It is a past unmediated by visual representation and yet our memories resonate with what we believe is the truth. This published information that created the perfect conditions for persecution at the time, persecution of women,

‘*Newes from Scotland*’

a pamphlet noting in gory detail the accusations, and tortures of these poor folk.

This is the visual information that still informs our perception and sadly, for many men and woman, a belief that in some way it was justified.

No smoke without fire.

In the zine Agnes- I write my own ‘*Newes from Scotland*’ - I continue with my thoughts and images, rephrasing the original deposition from the C16th, by modernizing the language of the deposition to show how absurd and unjust were the charges.

The simple, innocuous charges stand at odds with the charred metal sculpture and its isolation. The neon, wrapped around the figure, in Scots reading the statement ‘nae a wutch, aenly a wummin’.

The candles at her feet, representing the numbers accused of witchcraft stand testament to a time of terror, judgment and execution, a time that tore the heart out of hope, family and safety, a time that still haunts our cultural memory; but a time we can’t quite remember, because it is buried so deep.

For shame.

¹ <https://www.witchesofscotland.com/podcast>