# A Gallus Un

Tracy Satchwill, 2026, Rural Life Museum

Tracy Satchwill in her studio

## Artist Statement

*A Gallus Un* grew from my research into Lincolnshire folklore and the writings of the folklorist Mabel Peacock. While exploring her books, letters, and small fragments of paper filled with drawings and dialect phrases, I became fascinated by the ways everyday stories carried traces of belief, fear, and imagination. The title comes from a local expression used to describe a troublesome or unsettling person, often used of women, spoken half in fear and half in mockery. I was drawn to these stories not as historical curiosities, but as places where women's knowledge, difference, and power were repeatedly misunderstood and misnamed.

The installation takes the form of an intimate gathering of whispered and fragmented female folkloric stories. Moving between an outer, daytime circle and an inner, nocturnal one, the work holds both playfulness and unease. Figures such as the magpie, the drowned woman, and the witch with her familiars appear not as moral warnings but as liminal presences, caught between fear and fascination rather than neatly resolved.

This project reflects my long-standing interest in women's inner worlds and the emotional residue carried through folklore, superstition, and ritual. I am particularly drawn to how belief gathers around women's bodies, gestures, and voices, shaping who is protected, blamed, silenced, or watched.

Material and process are central to the work. The banners were made directly onto calico using paint, sewing, found objects, and everyday materials that already carry cultural meaning. Working at this scale for the first time was both ambitious and uncertain requiring a slower, more physical process of layering, stitching, and revisiting surfaces over time. Rather than illustrating stories directly, I allowed marks, stitches, and accumulations to guide the work, creating surfaces that feel handled, worked, and lived with.

*A Gallus Un* is conceived as an immersive installation. I am interested in how people move through space and how meaning can emerge through proximity, atmosphere, and attention. The installation invites viewers to step inside a shared environment and sit with ambiguity, allowing folklore to be felt not as something distant or finished, but as something still active, unresolved, and emotionally present.

Gallus: wild, sprightly, impudent, mischievous.

Extract from the play, *A Gallus Un,* by Mabel Peacock

## The Outer Day Circle

The outer circle brings together banners rooted in daylight, community, and social belief. These works draw on rural folklore, superstition, and customary knowledge that shaped how women were seen, judged, instructed, and controlled in everyday life.

Here, power is negotiated through signs, warnings, inherited wisdom, and ritual care. Fear and protection sit side by side. What appears as common sense or tradition often masks anxiety about female autonomy, desire, and knowledge. Birds, trees, eyes, and figures become carriers of meaning, shaped less by what they are than by what others project onto them.

Across these banners, women are shown navigating systems of belief that both sustain and restrict them. Knowledge is shared, distorted, passed on, and endured. The outer circle holds these tensions in the open, where judgement is public and survival depends on learning how to read the signs.

## The Inner Night Circle

The inner circle of A Gallus Un moves into shadow. Here, the imagery becomes more intimate and inward, shaped by superstition, fear, desire, and divination. These night banners reflect the darker currents of rural folklore, where women's power was both repressed and reimagined through figures such as the witch, the healer, the ghost, and the seer.

Collectively, the works form a descent into myth and memory. Drawing on Lincolnshire folk narratives recorded by Mabel Peacock, they interlace dialect tales, charms, and belief with contemporary feminist readings. Within this nocturnal circle, female figures are persecuted, protected, and transfigured, their stories hovering between terror and transcendence, punishment and persistence.

Together, these banners illuminate the psychological terrain of *A Gallus Un*: longing, cunning, and forbidden knowledge. What was once feared or silenced is reimagined as agency, endurance, and mythic presence.

## Hinder Witches of their Will

This banner embodies both the cruelty of accusation and the endurance of the accused. It draws upon Lincolnshire tales from *Country Folk-lore Vol. V.*, collected by Mabel Peacock and Mrs Gutch, in which women such as Nanny Moody were hunted, humiliated, and killed under suspicion of witchcraft.

The superstition of the evil eye, the belief that a woman's gaze alone could blight crops, sicken livestock, or curse a man, becomes a central metaphor for the projection of fear onto female power. What was named as danger was often simply independence, knowledge, or difference.

Here, the eyes are both wound and weapon, a mark of persecution and a site of defiance. The banner holds the tension between how women were made monstrous and how they endured, carrying their will through silence, shadow, and survival.

*Hinder Witches of their Will (detail)*, 2026. Mixed media on calico fabric, 250 × 150 cm.

The following happened to Nanny Moody, a supposed witch, who lived here within the recollection of some of the old people now alive. Some young persons invited Nanny to go with them to the public house, and like most old girls of her day, though a witch, she made no objection to taking a drop of the creature. She accordingly went with the party, but no sooner had she passed the threshold of the house, than they compelled her to sit down on a chair, the seat of which had been previously prepared and stuck full of pins with the points upwards, nor was she suffered to rise from this seat of purgatory till those who brought her had drawn blood, and were perfectly satisfied she had undergone a sufficient degree of pain. This treatment must have subjected her to great inconvenience for some time after, as she could not sit down without feeling the effect of her rough treatment. Thatch had oft and privately been taken from the roof of her dwelling, and burned by those over whom she was supposed to exercise her magic art; straws were frequently placed across the path, where she had to pass, in hopes to render ineffectual her mystic power, but what the united efforts of the parishioners could not do, by burning her thatch, placing straws across her path or wearing about their persons, as a charm, a small piece of the Wickin tree, Death at length accomplished, for he most effectually *laid* poor Nanny, at once depriving her of life and all the witchery she was imagined to possess.—MACKINNON.

'Vervein and Dill
Hinder witches of their will.'

'Trefoil, Vervein, John's wort, Dill,
Hinder witches of their will.'

E. PEACOCK, i., p. 85.

Extracts from *Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.*
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

## The Charmed Tree

The ash tree was believed to hold powerful protective and healing qualities. Twigs were used to charm away illness, while roots and branches were woven into everyday rites of care. In this work, the ash appears as the Tree of Life, a bearer of feminine wisdom and sustaining knowledge carried across generations.

Yet this power was not always benign. In some rural customs, ash branches were also used as instruments of punishment against women, revealing how tradition could legitimise control as well as care. What protected could also wound.

Birds such as the cuckoo and storm cock, drawn from Peacock's letters, appear across the fabric, marking time, weather, and watchfulness. The tree stands as both shelter and witness, holding memory, endurance, and a quiet, persistent strength.

*The Charmed Tree (detail)*, 2026. Mixed media on calico fabric, 250 × 150 cm.

**Scotton.** *Horseshoes under Ash Trees.*—In grubbing up old stumps of ash trees, from which many successive trees have sprung, in the parish of Scotton, there was found in many instances an iron horseshoe. The one showed to me measured $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $4\frac{1}{4}$ in. The workmen seemed to be familiar with this fact, and gave me the following account: The shoe is so placed to 'charm' the tree, so that a twig of it might be used in curing cattle over which a shrew mouse had run, or which had been 'overlooked.' If they were stroked by one of these twigs, the disease would be charmed away.—N. & Q.[5], vol. ix., p. 65.

Extract from *Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.*
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

Detail

**Esh,** the ash. There is a widespread opinion that if a man takes a newly-cut '*esh*-plant' not thicker than his thumb, he may lawfully beat his wife with it.

Extract from A Glossary Of Words by Edward Peacock

## One for Sorrow

The magpie has long been read as an omen of misfortune, its solitary appearance burdened with meanings shaped by superstition rather than certainty. In rural belief, the bird became a site where fear gathered, a living sign through which anxiety, expectation, and dread were projected.

Here, the magpie appears watchful and commanding, suspended between accusation and misunderstanding. Neither devil nor victim, it occupies an uneasy space where judgement forms before knowledge. Its perceived power is not inherent, but assigned, revealing how belief transforms presence into threat.

Below, gestures of protection emerge in response. Charms intended to ward off harm speak to care and vigilance, but also to unease. Together, the figures hold a tense exchange, exploring how signs are read, how blame is assigned, and how power is imagined in moments of uncertainty. What is named as danger may instead be a misunderstood presence, made fearful through belief alone.

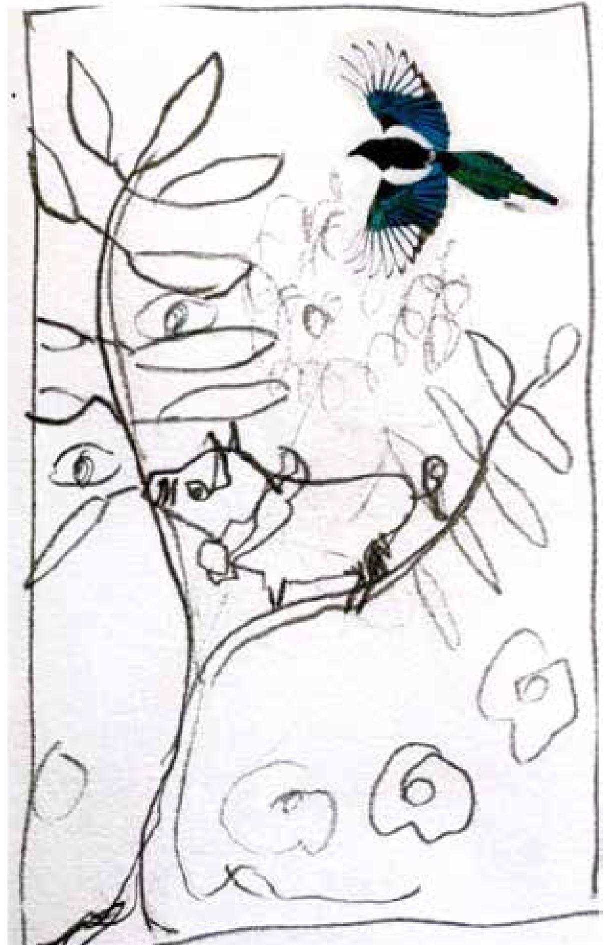
*One for Sorrow (detail)*, 2026. Mixed media on calico fabric, 250 × 150 cm.

**Doddington.** You make a garland of the branches and hang them round your pig's neck, more especially when **it** is first put up to fatten. Then it cannot possibly be bewitched.—*Lincs. Folk Names*, p. 23.

**Grantham.** *Magpie.*—A cuckoo made us blithe, but a single magpie filled us with forebodings. Need I repeat the old verse?

> *One*, for sorrow ; *Two*, for mirth ;
> *Three*, for a wedding ; *Four*, for a birth ;
> *Five*, for a fiddler ; *Six*, for a dance ;
> *Seven*, for Old England ; *Eight*, for France.

Extracts from *Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.*
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

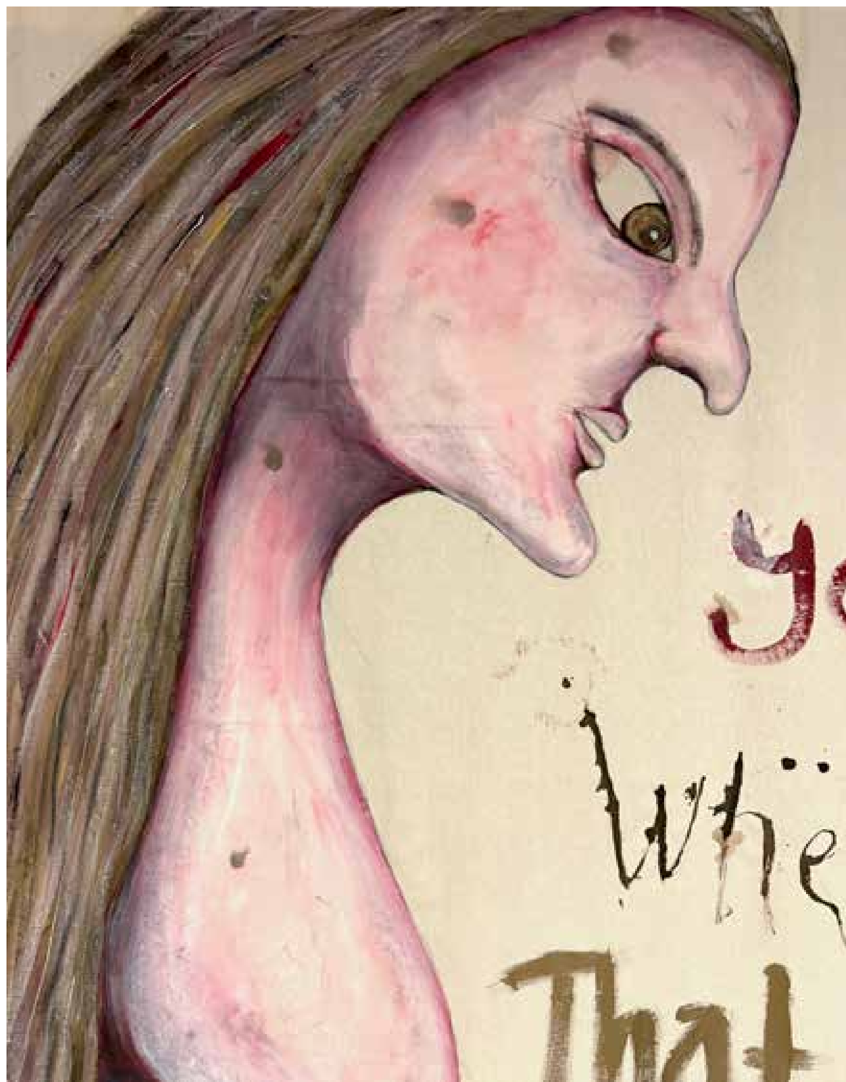


Sketchbook idea

## Old Joan and Sweet Sis

This banner centres on the exchange of knowledge between women across generations. Through the figures of Old Joan and Sweet Sis, it reflects the bittersweet truths older women have long passed to the young: cautions shaped by lived experience, resilience learned through endurance, and a clear-eyed realism about marriage, love, and survival.

Fragments of dialogue are drawn from *Snow White and Rose Red*, a play written by Mabel Peacock, where women speak with wit, cynicism, and care. This is not romantic instruction, but practical wisdom. Knowledge is passed matrilineally, carried through tone, repetition, and warning, shaped by what has been endured rather than idealised.




*Old Joan and Sweet Sis (detail)*, 2026. Mixed media on calico fabric, 250 × 150 cm.

The names Old Joan and Sweet Sis are taken from Plough-Jacks, characters recorded in *Country Folk-lore Vol. V*, where the pair appear as contrasting figures: one youthful and hopeful, the other marked by experience and defiance. Here, they are reimagined not as caricatures, but as carriers of inherited understanding. Together they hold a shared truth: that love may promise sweetness, but wisdom often comes through sorrow.

NANCY (singing). When I was a maiden
My grandmother said,
"You'll learn when you marry,
That sorrow you've wed.
For, let him be kindly
And true as he can,
A man, at the best,
Why, he's only a man."

Extract from the unpublished playscript, *Snow-White and Rose-Red,* by Mabel Peacock

Another character designated ' Sweet Sis,' was undertaken by one of the more juvenile of the company, and a third named ' old Joan,' both habited in female costume, the former to represent an attractive young lady, and the latter a repulsive, brazen-faced woman, were the most conspicuous performers.

Extract from *Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.*
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

Sketchbook idea

# Another Fool in Love

This banner is based on *The Secret*, a poem collected by Mabel Peacock, where birds speak to one another of a hidden love. Their exchange is coded and whispered, carried outside human law, church, or permission. Feeling moves through non-human voices, protected and exposed at once.

Here, the certainty of the secret is unsettled through repetition and pattern. What begins as tenderness becomes inevitable, almost dismissive, echoing how women's emotions have often been treated as foolish, excessive, or easily overridden. Love is shared, but not safeguarded. It circulates quietly, carrying both intimacy and quiet cruelty.

*Another Fool in Love*, detail, 2026, calico and mixed media, 250 x 150 cm

## THE SECRET.

"*Mein zärtliches Geheimnis*
*Weisz schon der ganze Wald.*"—H. HEINE.

I ONLY whispered to the thrush,
That warbled on the beech;
But he, although I bade him hush,
Told every bird in reach.

Told every blesséd bird, I say,
And every tree that grows:
The swallow came but yesterday,
And now the swallow knows.

I only whispered to the thrush;
But what a faithless bird!
The very mole can make me blush,
For even he has heard.

The runnel flashing down the lane,
The breeze that blows above,
Can sing with glee, and sing again:
"Another fool in love!"

Extracts from *Lincolnshire Rhymes and Other Verses*
by Mabel Peacock

Sketchbook idea

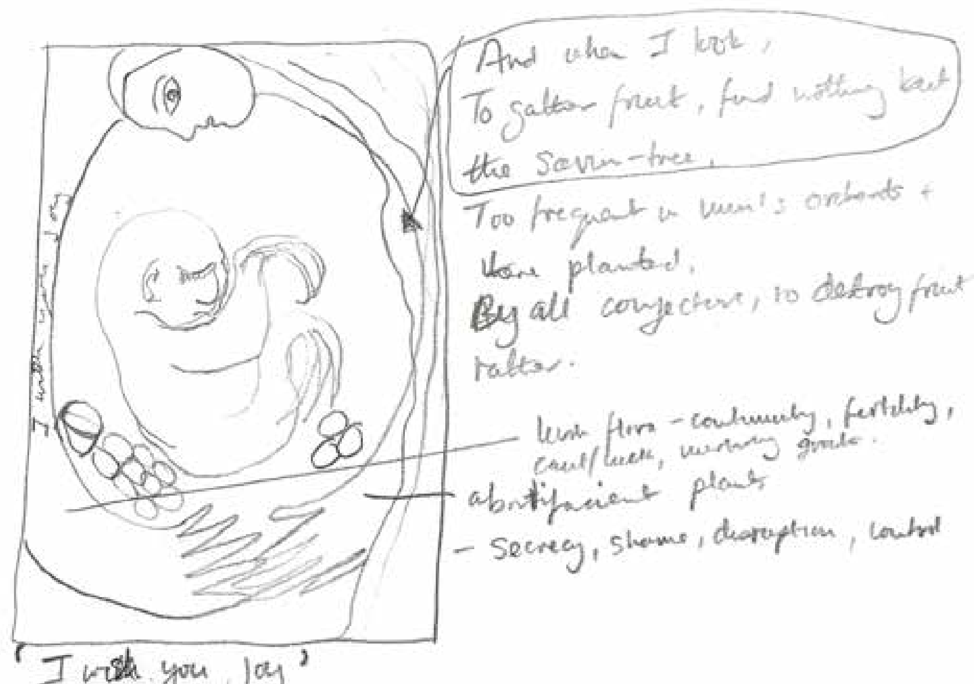
## I Wish You Joy

Rooted in rural beliefs surrounding childbirth, purity, and hidden loss, this work entwines blessing and warning. At its centre, a pale female figure encircles a veiled infant, her gesture both protective and enclosing. She may be read as a mother or an earth-bound goddess, a giver and withholder of life, holding power over what is born, delayed, or refused.

The child is marked by superstition. Born in its caul, nails uncut, larger than a newborn, it exists in a state of suspension, part miracle, part threat. One hand remains closed, carrying secrecy and inherited fate. The other opens outward, a gesture of offering, vulnerability, and uncertain future. Together they hold the duality of birth itself: hope and fear, blessing and danger.

Surrounding the infant are gifts traditionally associated with birth alongside plants linked to the prevention of it. Care and control sit uncomfortably together, reflecting the quiet knowledge women carried about fertility, survival, and loss. The phrase I Wish You Joy, spoken as a blessing, carries a hidden edge, a wish shaped by expectation, judgement, and silence.

*I Wish You Joy (detail)*, 2026. Mixed media on calico fabric, 250 × 150 cm.




Sketchbook idea

*Birth.*—At the birth of a child, the father receives the congratulations of his friends, and the phrase 'I wish you joy,' is the first salutation he hears after the event takes place. . . . It is vulgarly believed that if a child be born with its hands *open*, it is an indication of liberality and benevolence, but if its hands be *closed*, the future individual will assuredly prove a churl. When it is first taken to a neighbour's house, it is presented with *eggs*, the emblem of abundance, and *salt*, the symbol of friendship. The christening is a season of rejoicing. It is the belief that, unless the child cry during the ceremony, it will not live. —*Man. and Cus.*, pp. 30, 31.

A woman, after she has been churched, is said to be clean; before that time it is held, among old-fashioned people, that it is sinful for her to go out of doors beyond the eaves-dropping.—E. P., i. p. 60.

Extracts from *Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.*
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

## Devil’s Harvest

St Mark’s Eve is a night associated with forbidden knowledge, prophecy, and danger, falling in early spring when growth and threat were believed to stir together. According to folklore recorded by Mabel Peacock, at midnight the fern was said to bud, flower, and seed all within a single hour, and the Devil would gather the seeds. Anyone who could catch them between two pewter plates was thought to gain uncanny knowledge and power.

In this scene, I focus on women who sought knowledge outside sanctioned authority, working with plants, seasons, and the land in ways that provoked fear and suspicion. Rather than fixed historical figures, these forms emerge as collective presences, shaped by folklore, accusation, and survival, suggesting an alternative lineage of power rooted in land, night, and lived experience.

Sketchbook idea

St. Mark's Eve is called the 'Devil's harvest,' because exactly at midnight ferns bud, blossom, flower, and seed, all in an hour, and the devil harvests the seed; therefore, if anyone can catch any of the seed between two pewter plates at the same time, he or she will become as wise as the devil.—L. N. & Q., vol. iii., p. 209.

Extract from *Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.*
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

Sketchbook idea

## Thou Art Very Bug Now, My Lad

A towering witch rises above the rural world that once mocked and feared her, her scale exaggerated, her presence impossible to contain. She feeds her familiars openly, no longer hidden or diminished, while the small farmer below appears uncertain, caught between ridicule and belief. Around her, the everyday objects once thought to ward off witchcraft begin to fail, their authority cracking at the edges. Ghostly familiars linger as shadows and witnesses, while her cloak and eyes are formed from everyday materials, blurring the boundary between the domestic and the dangerous. Drawing on Lincolnshire folklore, the work reflects how fear and superstition were projected onto women whose knowledge unsettled the community, and imagines what happens when that power is no longer contained.

Sketchbook idea

When before her dwelling, he hailed her, and she answered him with mocking words:

> 'I must suckle my cubs,
> I must buckle my shoes,
> And then I will give you your supper.'

and in a little while she started out of her den, armed on hands and feet with cruel, ripping claws, to throw herself on the man who had dared to confront her.

In Lincolnshire some people, after eating boiled eggs, will break the shells to prevent the witches from converting them into boats, because an ancient superstition gave to those unhappy beings the power of crossing the sea in egg-shells.—N. & Q.[4], vol. v., p. 516.

Old Mary Atkin, to whom I shall have to refer again, was one of these 'wise women.' She was the wife of a most respectable farm bailiff, who did not hold with her goings on, although he dared not check them. Several waggoners boarded in their house, and one morning, their breakfast bread and milk being sadly burnt, a lad threw his portion in her face. Quietly wiping it off she merely said, 'Thou art very bug now, my lad; but jest thou wait till thee and thy team gets to top of Cowbank: thou'lt be main sorry then, I'll go bail! See if thou ardn't.' All went well enough till they reached the place indicated, when suddenly the horses stopped short, shivered and sweated and shook, and not a step would they move one way or the other till, having called a man from a cottage near at hand, he went back and on bended knees besought Mary to lift the spell. When he returned the horses promptly moved on without further hitch. . . .

Extracts from *Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.*
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

## Jenny Stannywell

A drowned woman named Jenny Stannywell was said to haunt the waters near Hibaldstow Fields, appearing with her head tucked beneath her arm. Neither fully punished nor at rest, she lingers between sorrow and accusation, a figure caught between worlds.

Holy wells and streams were once places of solace, where women left rags, coins, and tokens in hope of cure or clarity. They peered into dark water to glimpse future husbands, to seek healing, or to ask for signs. These gestures were part devotion, part desperation, quiet appeals to forces older than the church.

Jenny becomes a vessel for these longings. Her haunting speaks not only of grief, but of persistence: the refusal to disappear, the endurance of unresolved lives, and the slow reclaiming of presence and power from the depths.

*Jenny Stannywell (detail)*, 2026. Mixed media on calico fabric, 240 × 150 cm.

**Lincoln.** There is a valuable chalybeate spring apparently connected with what was once 'Monk's Abbey,' which is dedicated to St. Mary Magdalen. It is popularly esteemed for its cures of 'bad legs' and other physical troubles.

Among the many other named-wells he [Abraham de la Pryme] mentions is Jenny Stanny Well, near Hibbaldstow Fields, which at the present day is reported to be haunted by a ghost, sometimes described as a woman carrying her head under her arm. This spectre is supposed to be Jenny Stannywell, who once upon a time drowned herself in the water. At least two other well or pond ghosts of the feminine sex are known in Lincolnshire, but so far as is recorded they carry their heads in orthodox fashion.

Extract from Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

Sketchbook idea

## New Moon, New Moon

At the first new moon of the year, young women and their communities gathered to perform rites believed to offer glimpses of marriage and destiny. Eyes were bound, moons were counted, invocations were spoken, small acts carried out in hope of knowing what lay ahead.

These rituals mixed play, desire, and anticipation. They were occasions for laughter, lovers, and farm servants, yet they were also shaped by constraint. Beneath the games lay futures already largely decided: who a woman might become, who she might belong to, and how her life would be measured.

Watched and protected by the Queen of Night, the moon becomes both guardian and jailer, offering comfort while quietly enclosing possibility. The invocation New Moon, New Moon is a plea for knowledge, but also a quiet rebellion, seeking freedom within strict limits.

*New Moon, New Moon (detail)*, 2026. Mixed media on calico fabric, 240 × 150 cm.

The following invocation, to be adressed to the first new moon of the year, is known in North Lincolnshire:

> New moon, new moon, I pray thee
> This night my true love for to see,
> Neither in his riches nor array,
> But in his clothes that he wears every day.

Another version of the third line is:

> Neither in his rich nor in his ray,

which if correct, may refer to 'ray' in the sense of striped cloth.—N. & Q.[10], i., p. 125. Cf. 10th S., i., p. 252.

Extract from Country Folk-Lore Vol. V.
collected by Mrs Gutch and Mabel Peacock

To have and to hold
to love, cherish and
obey

Sketchbook ideas

Tracy Satchwill in her studio

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