

NEW ENGLAND LITERARY NEWS | NINA MACLAUGHLIN

# A book of gender-role pioneers; witches in history and now; antique-book sellers, collectors gather

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GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 09, 2018

## Gender-role pioneers

Ria Brodell began “[Butch Heroes](#)” (MIT) at libraries in Boston, researching the lives of people who “were strong or brave in the way they lived their lives and challenged their societies’ strict gender roles.”

The just published work pairs Brodell’s painted portraits of each subject, done in the style of Catholic prayer cards, with minibiographies.

Katherina Hetzeldorfer, who lived in 15th-century Germany, was drowned for sexual transgression; she’s pictured sinking underwater holding a stone, her preferred method of seducing women disappearing with her. Lisbetha Olsdotter, aka Mats Ersson, was beheaded for, among other things, deserting husband and children, going around disguised as a man, and publicly mocking god.

Brodell’s subjects come from around the world and span the 15th century to the 20th.



In words and pictures, the artist and educator has created a frank, compelling, sensitive, and celebratory compendium of gender-role pioneers, telling the stories and shining light into a corner of history that has long been in darkness. Brodell will discuss the book at Porter Square Books in Cambridge on Nov. 17 at 3 p.m.

### **The season of the witch story continues**

Salem's witch-based economy tries to catch its breath in this post-Halloween moment. But experts know that the tradition of witches extends beyond a holiday in fall, reaching back centuries and remaining alive today as Ellen Evert Hopman shows in her new book, "[The](#)