

"No power inhabits a deck of tarot cards beyond what you, as the tarot reader, bring to them. There is no doctrinaire meaning for any card, and no authority on high handing down pronouncements. There is only your knowledge of myth and symbol. These things you may consider through the study of classical Greek and Roman myth, physics, all forms of mysticism and occultism, even psychology. You combine this with your own life experience [...] and bring it to the cards."¹

About a year ago, I had a conversation with artist Albin Werle about tarot and the idea of making our own deck. We both agreed on the overwhelming perspective in even daring to attempt to render all seventy-eight cards – it could take a lifetime! I recall saying: '*We should get twenty-two artists together and each do one card from The Major Arcana. We would then end up with a completely unique tarot deck; essentially a reflection of the renewed concern with the arcane happening in contemporary art and the art world right now...*'

And so *this* Fool's Journey begins.

I spent my teenage years in a pretty '*witchy*' state: hip length dark green hair, piled on jewellery, knee high Dr. Martens boots, *Heksens Håndbog* [The Witch's Guidebook] in pocket, listening to hard core, punk and black metal. Magic, potions, flying spells, fairies and other unworldly creatures were an integral part of what was normal daily life for me and my friends. We created our own secret alphabet, made thousands of obscure drawings and watercolours, mystic rituals, esoteric ceremonies and art performances at twelve o'clock midnight on vacant building sites around Copenhagen. Essentially, I have always been drawn to the arcane, to fairy tales and fantasy, to '*walking through the wardrobe*' and entering the realm of magic and the occult. Still, it was not until about four or five years ago that I actually owned my first deck of tarot cards.

The oldest surviving tarot cards were commissioned by Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan and date back to 15th century Italy when tarot was still called Trionfi (triumphs/trump) cards and used for everyday card games. A tarot deck consists of seventy-eight cards in total divided in two groups: The Major and The Minor Arcana. Arcana means Mysteries or Secrets. The Major Arcana comprise of twenty-two (trump) cards depicting main stages or events that can happen in life and are often referred to as '*The Fool's Journey*' - beginning with the card *The Fool*, a symbol of beginnings, innocence, ignorance, potential etc. Each of the remaining twenty-one cards represents a '*doorway*' or mirror, a prospect or misconception on *The Fool's* journey through life. The remaining fifty-six cards depicts '*minor*' aspects of daily life represented in the four symbolic suits comprising the Minor Arcana: wands, cups, swords and pentacles.

Tarot is a practice that allows us to listen to our inner voice and our intuitive self. Tarot is transformational – each card can serve as an instrument to help us to understand our past, present and future through symbolism and design. It is a practice we can all undertake, a language all can learn to read, understand and reflect on - if we take time to study the cards. The symbolism of tarot is already known to us, it is all around us, infused in our popular culture – in art, fashion, design, commercials, street signs – even emoji's. There is no hocus-pocus or fortune telling involved – no big hoop earrings, headscarves and crystal balls – more tarot is a tool; a collective symbolic language which has been passed down through time.

"The fascinating thing is that reading tarot cards works. It leads you to answers and insights. These need to be checked just as thoroughly as any other personal impression, but typically you will find that a new and unexpected perspective opens up. And this is often just as strange *and* familiar as things can be in dreams. You'll sometimes even have the feeling that whatever seems to be providing information through the cards knows you better than you know yourself."²

Tarot has never been more popular than now. In our post-internet, post-covid, post-pretty-much-everything era, it's no surprise that people are looking for ways to find meaning. Tarot cards can do

¹ Alchemy of a Blackbird by Claire McMillan, Atria Books

² The Wonderful and the Unexpected, *Tarot for You*, The Tarot, A.E. Waite and P. Coleman Smith, The Story of the World's Most Popular Tarot, Taschen

exactly that. Tarot allows us to see the alchemy of ourselves, aiding the creative process, raising questions, unblocking obstacles and revealing desires or fears – guiding and directing us. Perhaps this is exactly why artists for centuries have embraced the medium for its capacity to push cultural identity forward and expand our views of ourselves and the world. At least, this is very much what attracts me. As female artists, such as Ithell Colquhoun, Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo, among others, are finally being truly recognized and getting a place in the history of art, I have not only found it inspiring to enter the realm of one of their great sources of inspiration but also highly pertinent to address this renewed interest in tarot which is occurring in the contemporary (art) world right now.

My conversation with Albin Werle undoubtedly encouraged me to dig much deeper into the realm of tarot and inspired me to curate the exhibition '*The Fool's Journey*' which was shown at Eighteen Gallery in Copenhagen in May 2024. The show was comprised of twenty-two internationally acclaimed artists working in a range of different media, all of whom I invited to interpret a card from the Major Arcana. As the curator or '*High Priestess*', as it were, I made a séance and pulled a card for each artist, thus it is the fortuitous spread of the tarot that has determined which artist got to make which card.

This complimentary book functions both as an exhibition catalogue as well as a tarot book, with a guide on how to use the accompanying Major Arcana tarot deck featuring each of the artworks. The book includes descriptions of each of the twenty-two cards as well as reflections on each artwork written by the artist in question. It further comprises two explanatory essays by Danish scholar and researcher Kasper Opstrup and British writer, curator and Artistic Director of Vienna Contemporary Francesca Gavin.

'The Fool's Journey' consists of artworks by Caroline Albsher, Kinga Bartis, Anders Brinch, Sidse Carstens, Richard Colman, Rose Eken, Siri Elfhag, Frederik Exner, Seana Gavin, Nina Hartmann, Loji Höskuldsson, Emma Kohlmann, Noa Lachmi, Oscar Chan Yik Long, Camilla Mihkelsoo, Johanna Seidel, Apolonia Sokol, Sonya Sombreuil, Anna Stahn, Suzanne Treister, Albin Werle, Sif Itona Westerberg, as well as a specially commissioned poem; '*The No-Card Card*' by danish author Adda Djørup. Collectively, these artists form a prominent, dynamically interconnected network - a contemporary coven if you like - spanning over a variety of media, age, nationalities, and gender.

"Tarot reminds us of the universality of our longing for meaning, for purpose, and for a connection to the divine. Tarot reflects not only a history of seekers, but also our journey of artistic expression and the way we use ink, paint and pencil to illuminate and to celebrate our shared human story."³

Rose Eken, Copenhagen 2024

³ The Sacred & The Arcane; *A brief History of Tarot*, p. 19, Tarot, The Library of Esoterica, Taschen