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-KB

FOREWORD

“Leave it to Christina Hale, a decidedly avant-garde artist who captures in her art the zeitgeist of her generation, to update the Tarot Card which originated in the 15th century. Hale utilizes her deft draftsmanship and brilliant color sense in producing a kaleidoscopic outpouring of images, at times terrifying, comic, ironic, or romantic. Her fertile imagination in bringing the mystery and fascination of the ancient Tarot to a new generation is a marvel.”

Robert Flynn Johnson
Curator Emeritus
Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

PREFACE

Although I consider myself more of a pantheist, I have found myself driven back into certain forms of Christian prayer. As agnostic as one may be, we quickly seek God on the battlefield. The Native American Church has conscripted Christianity in the way that most forms of mutualism elegantly mine a body for needed nutrients in order to survive. I was lucky to sit in ceremony with Jim Harithas and Irv Tepper in 1993. I have always been drawn to Native American culture as it embodies a connection and attention to nature that is essential to humanity's common sense and intuitive wisdom. Irv Tepper was my sculpture teacher at the San Francisco Art Institute, and Jim Harithas, a powerful curator from Houston, Texas. From this convergence began my career as an artist.

At the San Francisco Art Institute, I studied film making and began drawing with Sam Tchakalian. Perspective and anatomy began to give me the tools to recreate the real world. The tarot drawings are many-layered constructions. For me, erasing has constituted a large part of drawing. Piles of eraser dust in the studio. I remember a painting teacher encouraging me to sketch out the forms before applying paint. Compared to the masters, I have had a very brief education in pictorial arts. It takes knowledge of a few techniques to create an illusion... reflection, sky, trees. Drawing the Crown Deck Tarot definitely pushed my drawing skills.

I feel that the imagination is prospective. Our times have molded some excellent prospectors...Matthew Barney, Raymond Pettibon, Rothko, Frida Kahlo, Dali, Marta Stang, and Sam and Shingo Francis being some of the visual artists that interest me. The Bauhaus, The Impressionists, The Surrealists and Michelangelo Buonarroti... inspiration from the past. Although I began in abstract paint, my first drawings were encouraged by Lia Harithas Blyth, Jim's daughter, in New York City in 1996. "Make them big!". So from the abandonment, isolation, and dystopia came my first figures and later objects in pencil. I feel that somehow my work is an act of contrition. That drawing structured my nihilism. I am interested in Shamanism, in the power of dreams, the subconscious, intuition. My early work seems to represent my struggles with conscience as I moved through different states of being. Paganism, perhaps Shamanistic Psychotherapy!

In studying the Tarot, I was forced to reevaluate the importance of composition. Because the Tarot dates from the 1500's, it gives any artist seeking to emulate it rich symbolism to recreate. When I draw for myself I rarely have an allegory or archetypal perspective. The mythology of my early work related to myself. The Tarot, when analyzed as a work of art, is a complex combination of historical knowledge, intuition, and luck of the draw. Interpreting cards in the context of a Tarot spread is an art beyond the classically inspired images themselves. The Crown Deck Tarot represents my very primary knowledge of representation. I have no deep understanding of Cartomancy but I gravitate

towards Alejandro Jodorowsky's use of the deck to subjectively encourage an inner life, to heal. To quote him, "To know the way to use the language of objects and the symbolic vocabulary in order to produce certain affects in people; basically, how specifically to direct the unconscious in its own language, be that by words, by objects, by acts." He emphasizes as well that "One cannot become a shaman or a sorcerer if one is not born into a primitive context." I feel that, through my art, I search for this primitive context. Color, religion, numerology, mythology, astrology, and alchemy all play a part in the images of the Tarot. The cards encourage a type of comparative analysis as their symbols lead the reader on.

An artist needs a patron and a patron needs an artist. I have known Katy Bucher since the 7th grade. I secretly applied to the San Francisco Art Institute and Katy volunteered to pay my tuition. She didn't end up paying my tuition, but on her faith I had the confidence to bridge the gap and engage in the practice of art. I have been truly fortunate to have had such a skilled patron and fellow artist to collaborate with over the years. I have worked on Katy's films doing sound and costuming, and she has commissioned drawings from me. The Crown Deck Tarot was initially commissioned as a gift. As the Covid shut down became a reality, we realized we had the luxury of time and the drawing began. In researching the Tarot, I found myself drawn into architecture, clothing styles, landscapes and character design, as well as an archetypal understanding of the events of human life. Rich seams of culture and history. Having to draw in a 9"x12" frame forced me into a new attention to detail. Some of the characters and animals that populate the deck are drawn from places I have spent time; Tahiti, Africa, Mexico, California and Europe. Some are tailored specifically to characters Katy wanted to include. The drawings are hand drawn pencil, pen, ink, colored pencil and acrylic on paper. Enjoy The Crown Deck Tarot! We had fun and worked hard to create it!

- Christina Hale

This project was intended as a love letter. A grandiose, romantic gesture of love. A gift for a lover who has never been.

It has been my experience that from time to time, it takes a blissful, besotted, irrational, occasionally hopeless love to push us to great leaps of faith, terrifying journeys into the unknown, and mad examinations of our feelings through art. I reckon that is the essence of a muse.

It was in the midst of that tumultuous state, on February 26, 2020 at 9:14 AM, I sent the artist, Christina Hale, the following email: "Hello Bean, Was thinking about commissioning a set of Tarot cards from you. Would need to be done by Christmas. I know its a big project but what do you think? Interested?..."

The Spring of 2020 was a crazy time. The COVID pandemic had just been unleashed and a lot of people were losing their jobs as businesses were forced to shut. People were getting sick. People were dying. Christina and I were going to be 50 that year and we had been friends since the early 1980's. I had been collecting her art since we were teenagers. I don't know the reasons that made her say yes to my proposal, but she did. And on January 27th, 2021, she sent me the last painting. Twelve months almost to the day, 79 pieces of art.

The year that passed between inspiration and completion (with a another year thrown in to make the decks themselves) was a rough ride. As is often the case, when you fantasize about something, or someone, the reality is quite a bit tougher. We don't tend to dream about the hard work and shitty bits. And so the cards gestated in this womb of chaotic experience and emotion, both personal and global. This is not a scholarly, definitive study of Tarot. This is the cumulation of my inspiration, Christina's interpretation, and a fair amount of research and reflection. Every drawing began with the study of several different sources; other, venerable Tarot decks, various books on the subject and a multitude of divination websites. Then we would share visual inspiration; photos, paintings, illustrations, other tarot cards, and then finally the personal elements that made the Crown Deck uniquely ours.

Anyone with passing familiarity to Tarot will have noticed the card definitions can vary widely from deck to deck, source to source, at times being almost diametrically opposed. Tarot is an art, not a science. It is both a game and an arcane tool depending upon the intention of its user, and as such, the meanings and readings derived from using the tool, yield different results. It is a symbolic language open to interpretation, nuance, and, let us be warned, influence. Thus the Crown Deck will speak a language formed by Christina's and my will and intention, written with letters learned from others (and loaded with their will and intention), finally translated and interpreted by you and set in the font of the person being read. As a baseline of understanding, perhaps it is best to examine the things that generally don't change from deck to deck, the basic elements of meaning that, in this book, head each page.

The interpretations of these cards could, of course, be construed as a reading for myself. An attempt to process turbulent emotions, to glean understanding of new ideas, to nurture personal growth from my experience. I have found that every examination of the cards means a constant evolution of perception. Always, there are new insights, a continuous honing of understanding and nuance. Ultimately, this deck is a collection of art. It is inspired by love and the resulting contemplation of Mind, Body, Soul and Will; Self, Other and The World, that is in turn, both the foundation of Tarot and the soul of Art.

The deck that resulted from all those paintings, the ones catalogued here, was given as a gift on Christmas 2021, in a handmade walnut box and wrapped in 100 year old ivory silk made from a tuxedo scarf of my great grandfather's, with hand embroidered initials.

As far as I know, it has never been opened. The accompanying piece of original art sits in its frame behind the wood stove, face to the wall.

But that's the thing, see? The trouble with gifts is that all too often, they are a reflection of ourselves more than of the person for whom they are intended. They become transactional. The OED defines a gift as "a thing given willingly to someone without payment", and although I didn't realize it at the time of inspiration, of creation, my reaction to the recipient's lack of enthusiasm showed me that truthfully, I did want payment for it; appreciation, love, regard, some acknowledgement of... what, exactly? Was it really more of a bribe, than a gift? The deck was no selfless Gift of the Magi. It, in all its grandiosity, was ultimately about me, not the other person. I thought it was an amazing gift, they did not. And after the initial crushing blow, that at 51 made me feel 15 again (in itself a gift), I had to consider the nature of such offerings. Unlike O. Henry's sacrificial generosity, these are the selfish gifts that at some level you hope will make The Other realize what they are missing. The ones you pour your blood, sweat and tears into, that only make the recipient uncomfortable. You know. You've been on one end or the other (hopefully both), of those gifts, the awkward ones you hide on a shelf in the closet but can't bring yourself to throw away.

But then again, they are also the ones that, if you're really lucky, you find years later and unwrap, unfold, unwind, read, project, rehang, and appreciate with new awareness. I count myself that lucky. I have had those gifts that, rediscovered, have morphed and expanded into something unexpectedly precious, now unburdened by the weight of expectation. And you realize how blessed you were to have affected, or been affected by, someone enough to memorialize it. To this end, I hope that someday, that walnut box is opened and the cards unwrapped, and the stitched little letters touched, and that far from the pressure of uneasy emotion, the Muse feels a sense of pleasure to know that they inspired an act of creation.

You can't make someone love you, not with money, not with gifts, not with love potions, and not with art. All the stories, and fables, and songs warn you about this. But still we are compelled to make something tangible from the intangible way we feel, and in honor of the people or things who inspire us to look beyond ourselves, to make art in an attempt to understand how we fit into the universal truth of human experience.

-Kathryn Bucher

INTRODUCTION

The first Tarot decks emerged in Italy sometime around 1420 AD. The cards have an old, rich history in Italy, France, Germany, and beyond, where they have been used in complex, multi-player games for centuries. From their initial use in card games, they quickly evolved into story-telling aids and, as they were often commissioned by influential families or royal courts, into political critique and court intrigue, using imagery and symbols with plausible deniability, rather than words that could get you killed.

It was not until the 16th century that Tarot began to be associated with esoteric symbolism and divination. The pre-verbal, mythographic language of Tarot allows room for personal freedom of interpretation alongside more conventional, traditional explanations attached to individual cards and their thematic imagery. The artwork in this exhibit emerged from a cross-pollination of traditional deck symbolism along with the artist's and deck co-creator's personal interpretation of the cards.

There are 22 Major Arcana and 56 Minor Arcana cards divided into 4 suits containing 14 cards each. In a general sense, the Sword and Stave are masculine suits and the Cup and Coin, feminine. Within the suits are other cards, generally the "Court" cards, that also represent archetypes of gender, and so combinations exist that are deeply binary (double feminine, double masculine) and others that have mixed traits.

Like most art, the cards are a bridge or series of bridges, between the non-verbal and language, between the "verb" of experiencing living and the "noun" of defining life's experiences; between the unconscious, the subconscious, and the conscious. So perhaps it's best to first just look at the art, to simply and instinctively experience it, before you seek to put those feelings into words or meaning, mine or any others.

The art is hand drawn pencil, pen, ink, colored pencil and acrylic on 9" x 12" paper.

-KB