

# **Deconstructing Tarot: The discovery of my own personal ascension through a reinterpretation of the Major Arcana cards**

By: Lacey Costantine



## **Research Questions:**

- How can tarot cards inspire personal meaning making and symbolism in contemporary art practice?



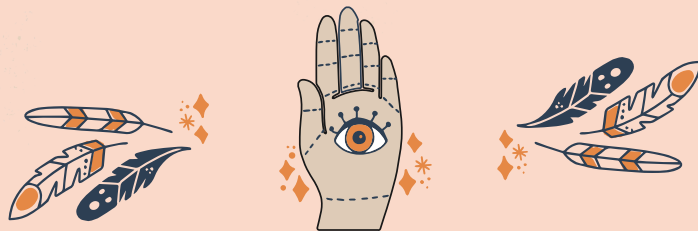
## Research Sub- Questions:

- ✧ How can creating my own tarot cards help me to explore what symbols mean to me through my own experiences? How does researching contemporary artists help me to make connections to my own practice?



## Research Sub-Questions:

- ✧ How can tarot cards be used by an art educator to teach in the k-12 classroom?



## Methodology

- Literature-Based Research
  - Scholarly texts and articles
- Art-Based Self Study
  - 2 days a week, creating two cards each of the two days
  - Journaling before, during the process of painting cards
  - Photo Documentation of each card



# Literature Review

01.



What is the historical significance of tarot?

**History**

02.



What is the influence of tarot cards in contemporary art?

**Contemporary**

03.



How can the symbolism in tarot be incorporated into education of K-12?

**Pedagogical**

01.



**History**



## The Start

"Began its life as a game with no purpose beyond providing mental stimulation. It contained no esoteric wisdom, could provide no spiritual advice and gave no clue as to how to conduct one's life." (Farely, 2009, p.3)

Started in the fifteenth century in Italy, created as a game to stimulate the brain. Exclusively made for the noble families, having images that portrayed their day to day life. Images like the nobles' ideal, and of the state and church.



Death and Ace of Cups  
1490s, hand-painted tarocco  
(tarot) cards by Antonio  
Cicognara (active  
1480–1500)

## The Start

- Freemason's took the cards and transformed them into the esoteric symbols that they are today. It was "originally constructed as a game, or a book of allegories, the tarot was co-opted by esoteric/ secret societies, became associated with their 'secret knowledge,' and eventually came to inscribe not only their magical 'initiation rituals,' but the magical path of the soul as well." (Sosteric, 2014, p.364)

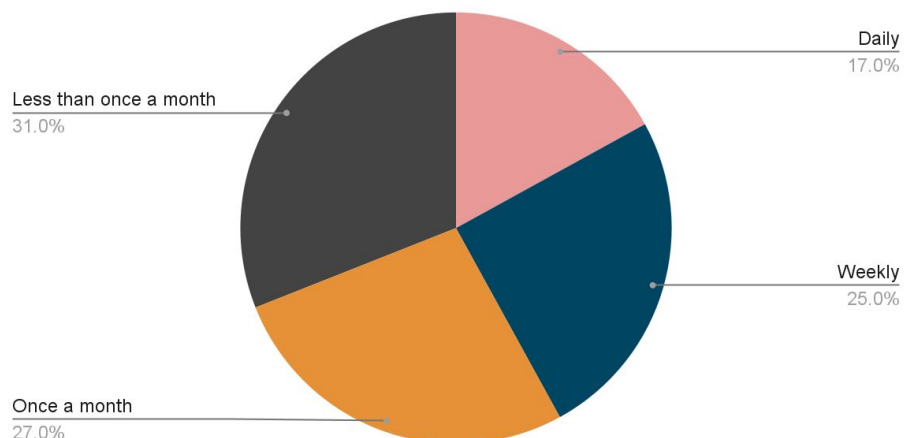




Rider - Waite tarot in  
1909 by Pamela Colman  
Smith

## Currently

51 percent of 13-25 year olds, engage in tarot cards or fortune-telling

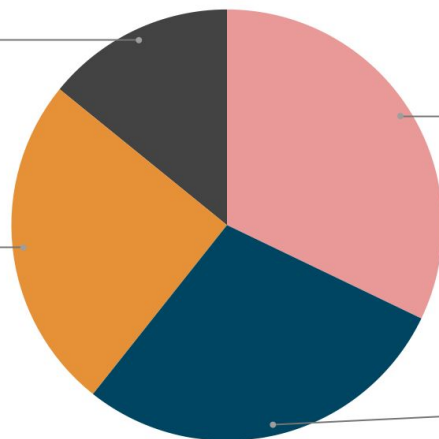


## Currently

Divination practices are most popular among young people who identify as:

Atheist  
14.2%

Jewish  
25.2%



Russian or Greek  
32.1%

Mormon  
28.5%



# 02.



## Contemporary Art Practice





## Isa Beniston

"Initially each card was a marker drawing on hand-cut wonky cardstock for my own personal use as a tool for reflection while in quarantine. I spent several hours each night working through the cards in chronological order. Composition and symbolism choices for these small prototypes were made following a book my mother used in the eighties for her own tarot project." (Beniston)



## Isa Beniston

THE GENTLE  
THRILLS TAROT:  
1ST EDITION  
2020



## Manzel Bowman

"Resonates with themes of Afro-Futurism while exploring utopian landscapes and iconography that often take on mystic and mythological subtexts. Utilizing a contemporary collage style yet drawing upon imagery of classic archetypes, Bowman creates his own highly original symbology, redefining the iconography of tarot tradition."

(Alagiah)

## Manzel Bowman

"Manzel's  
Tarot  
2018"



# 03.



## Pedagogy

### The Black School

The Black School, an experimental art school, this school created a special tarot deck to be used to teach. This deck was "featured in The Black School's exhibition at the New Museum in the summer of 2018, The Black School: Process Deck is a tarot-style interactive methodology tool for brainstorming and designing creative activism projects. The cards are to be used in an art making capacity to help creatives, educators, and organizers explore how they can activate change on a local level. Through a series of questions and choices participants identify issues of primary significance to them, define the terms and context around that/those issues and design impactful projects to address them." (Black School, 2018)



# Black School



# Art-Based Self Study



"Tarot is storytelling. It's what we do when we read the cards.  
Telling stories imbues us with supernatural power - the power  
to change our story."

—Sasha Graham

## Materials Used

- Gouache Paint
- Watercolor Paper
- Sketchbook
- Painters Tape
- Pencil
- Ruler
- Micron Pen
- Ink





# Process

## Schedule and Process

Working two days a week to create a total of four cards a week I would start by first brainstorming and reflecting on my image. Doing this through the reading of the three to four words used to describe the title of the tarot card. Once a personal symbol was formed I would think about the colors and work out the sketch before painting. Measuring the edge of my card and the box for the title and roman numerals.



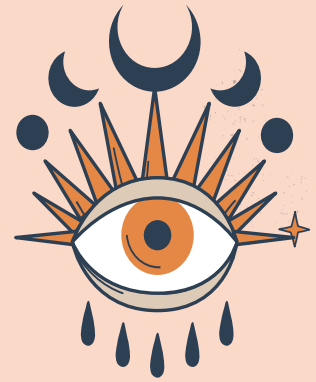
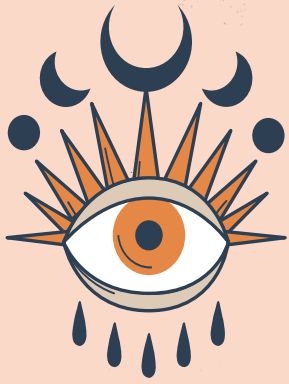
# Process

## Schedule and Process

For the creation of the backs of all of my cards I carved out my design into a soft rubber block. Using a pewter colored ink I printed the backs of each card and painted the images onto the front of every card. This process helped me to obtain nearly identical images which is a feature of tarot cards.



# Data Analysis



01.



What is the importance of ritual?

**Ritual**

02.



How do personal experiences affect our symbolism and meaning making process?

**Symbolism**

03.



How does the future impact our own identity?

**Futurism**

04.



What are other artists  
doing with tarot?

**Contemporary**



05.



How can the symbolism in  
tarot be incorporated into  
education of k-12?

**Pedagogy**

01.

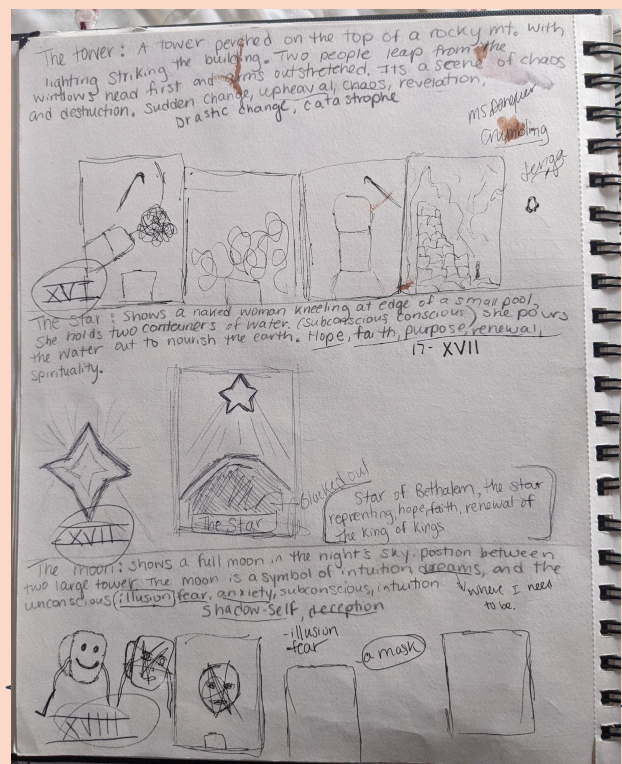
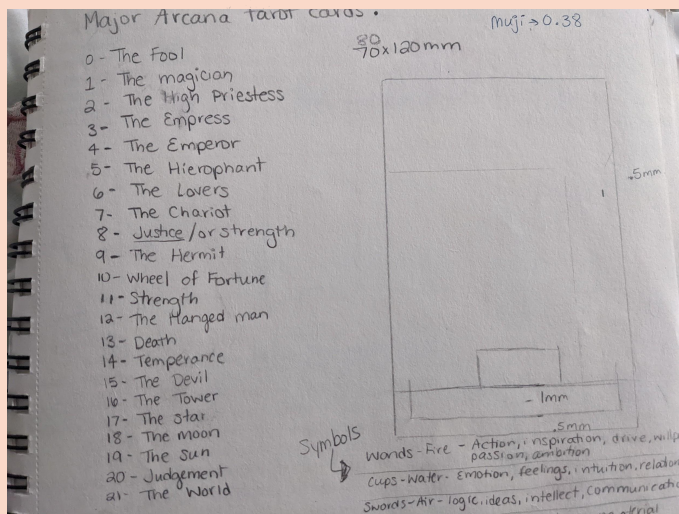


**Ritual**

# Ritual

Ritual is one category that immediately drew me in, it is a term that is often associated with the tarot cards. This word for me, though did not involve the traditional use of this term. It is not the use of the cards in a ritualistic manner of pulling cards and placing them in a certain set. It was for me rather the process of creating the card and the ritualistic schedule that I formed for myself while making my images.

# Ritual





# Ritual

2/19/2022

Started researching each major arcana card, with 21 in total, I create a list of each one along with the # that is incorporated with each one. Taking each title of the cards and start guiding them out when I do this, I plan to research what the cards mean, and the messages that it conveys. As I go through each one, I jot down some ideas that come into mind as I read the description. Often the description is based on the Rider-Waite deck, which is the most universal deck and most recognizable.

2/17/2022

Having all the descriptions of each card in front of me I start to brainstorm on what each symbol means to me and my experiences. Looking at the physical description and meaning of the card I jot down the first ideas that come to mind. Sketching out what symbols come to my mind through prompts that describe what each card means. Taking from my past experiences and what I pull from my archetype and what the first image that comes up. Flipping through the cards and what the first stands out. For the death card, its positive, considered and what I have, death stands out of all of them. Renewal and a stage in your life is ending and another first serious experience with it, and what I think of death I think about my Grim reaper, and my grandfather passing away. A symbol that I associate with my grandfather is a lady bug. Picture, Death to me, is the Grim reaper with a scythe that has a lady bug on it. So I sketched out a Grim Reaper, the star that has been in my life. It, going through the rest of the cards, the star of Bethlehem, and the star from my experiences, I think about the star of Bethlehem, and the star since I was young, and that is the Star of Bethlehem, as its meaning resonates with the star of the nativity. Meaning: hope, faith, renewal, and purpose. The next card that stood out to me was the Devil card, when thinking about this, I imagine the concubine and my experiences growing up in a private school. The Devil to me is either the image of a red guy with a pitchfork or the Devil card is about the balance between good/civil, with the image of the half-goat half human. Growing up the "pull" of the Devil was there and you were to resist, but this is the Angel/Devil pull who do you listen to? The Wheel of fortune was next, with my image being possibly the seasons as the wheel of fortune often has to do with cycles.

2/19/2022

Using watercolor paper I started cutting out my cards, after trying Bristol board. However it was smoother than I wanted, and the watercolor paper held the gouache paint better. I've been practicing using gouache paint with different images, I just need to learn the right amount of water. I've also been thinking about how I want to do the backs of



# 02.

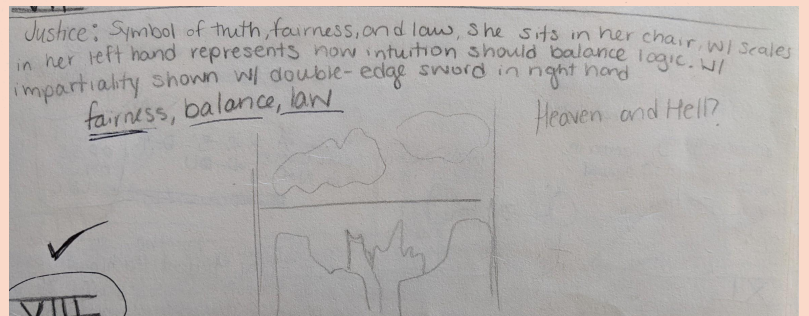


# Symbolism



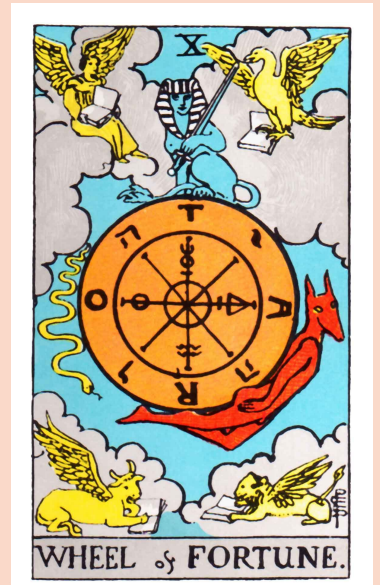
# Symbolism

Creating my own deck assisted me into this personal journey and narrative, what are my own archetypal symbols, and why are they what they are? These were the questions that I asked myself as I worked on each card, not going in any particular order I started with whichever card title and description caught my attention.



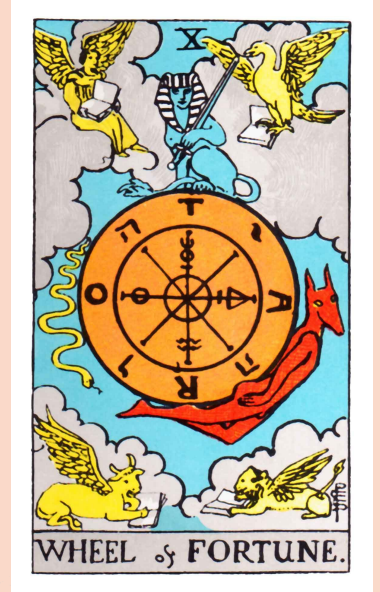
# Symbolism

Reading the title of the card and the three to four words associated with it I would start to jot down what are some things that I think about when I read these words all together. One example of this is the card Wheel of Fortune, this cards association words are change, cycles and fate.

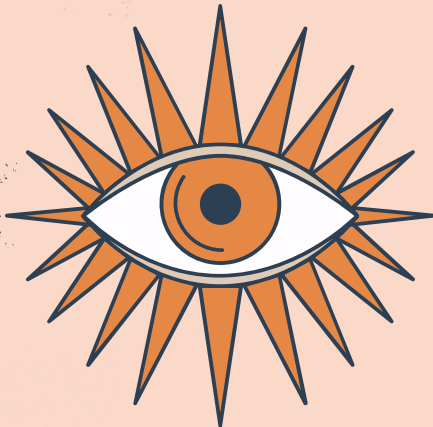


✧ Wheel Of Fortune

## Symbolism



03.



Futurism



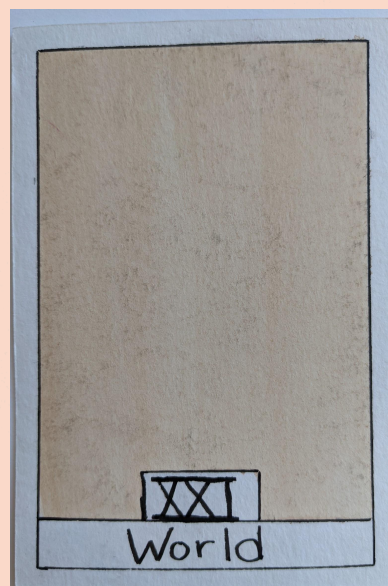
## Futurism

Tarot cards are often used to tell the past, present and future while creating my own deck. I focused on my past and present experiences that I have had. The creation of my deck can be used as a memory map of my mind and what my history is. Experiences and associations that even I have forgotten about until the start of this project.



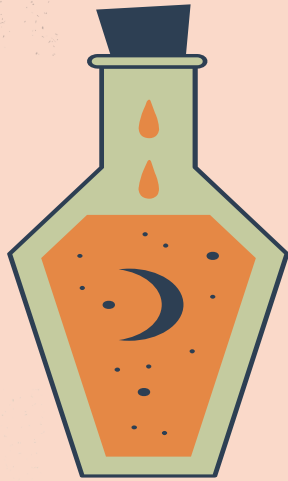
## Futurism

When creating my World card the idea of the future really had me reflecting on what my own future looks like, and how I do not feel like I am at the end of a journey. To me, graduating college is not the end of a journey but more the end of chapter that helps to build my story. What is the next chapter?





# 04.



## Contemporary

## Contemporary

“For hundreds of years, artists and designers, from Salvador Dalí to the fashion designers at Dior, have returned time and again to Tarot cards as a source of inspiration. The symbolic meaning behind each card has largely remained the same over the centuries, and yet the visual interpretations of those symbols have been continually adapted, reworked and transformed in order to suit their certain time, place and culture.” (Alagiah, 2020)



## Contemporary

The current reality of the world, has brought the surge of tarot use and tarot creation. This is not unusual though,

"If you look throughout history, whenever there has been some sort of upheaval or some sort of collective anxiety in society, interest in psychics has shot up," he said. "The reason is simple," Mr. Alcock continued. "People experience a lack of control and anxiety. We'd all like the pandemic to end." And without definitive answers from scientists, physicians or elected officials, people are turning to more spurious sources for reassurance."  
(Macdonald, 2021)



# 04.



## Pedagogy

## Pedagogy

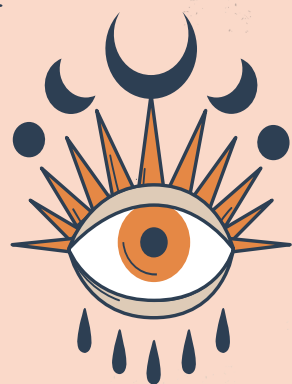
Often students are told to make certain art projects with specific themes, however students are not taught to think more deeply into the why. Everyone has had experiences in life that have impacted the way they view or perceive certain things in art. However, often if you ask a student, why they created a painting or drawing the way they did often the answer is very vague or the student does not really know.



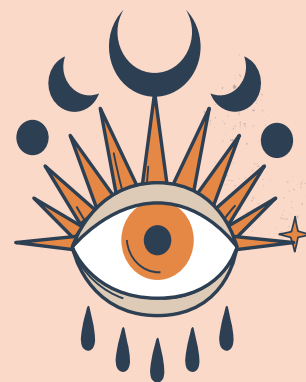
## Pedagogy

Teachers can help to develop students skills of interpreting their own art through the concept of tarot, and contemporary artists. Each person has different associations to things, and even though these may overlap with others, often a symbol is unique to that particular student. "When you allow yourself to explore your own personal symbolism, there is character and uniqueness to the choices you make which puts your work in a category all its own...Personal symbolism can come into play no matter what kind of painting or drawing you create. It raises our awareness about the many things that objects, colors and textures can communicate to viewers, which every artist should try to be aware of." (Jordan)





# Findings



## Findings: Ritual

Organizing my time was an important part of my ritual in creating these cards. Without this schedule and planning I would not have gotten all of my cards done on time. Carving out time to journal my thoughts and meditate I would not have made the vast connections that I did with my own personal symbolism.



## Findings: Symbolism

The relevance of symbols to a person is hugely impacted by that person's own personal journey and experiences. These symbols do not come into light until one really sits down to meditate on them. This discovery came from the research and art based self study. Seeing all the different symbols that artists make from their own personal experiences is vastly differently from deck to deck.



## Findings: Futurism

For myself I wanted to emphasis how the future is unknown and is something that can not be fully predicted. And that the future something that will change how we view things and what our current symbols are. We are forever changing our identities and views, it is not a solid concept but rather fluid. Thinking that we as humans do not change as we grow and develop is an unrealistic ideal. We have to change as we go on, because if we do not, we would not be able to adapt and live the best versions of ourselves at that given time.



## Findings: Contemporary

Other artists are trying to find symbols that relate to their story and own profile, the artists often creating cards that have some personal meaning to them like my own cards. However unlike me, these artists are including the fact that people will be looking and these cards and buying them to use so these symbols are more universal than mine. Not that people looking at mine can not find any connection to them as some symbols or images may relate to that person or they may find their own meaning in my images. Yet, for my cards that is not the goal, these cards are for my own personal use.



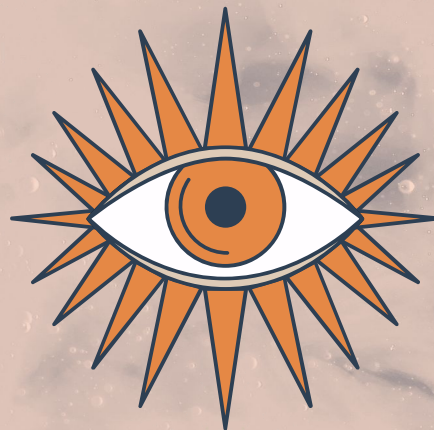
## Findings: Pedagogy

This study assisted me in really digging deeper into the pedagogical impact that personal symbolism can have on students. It is important that students are given the option to fully delve deep into their memories and experiences. And when they do this that they make connections to these experiences to certain symbols. This is something that could be done in schools with the start of a journaling curriculum to help these students formulate their thoughts in a more productive way. It would ultimately develop the students to be more well rounded artists that will be able to speak freely about their artwork.



## Conclusion

This studio based self study I have learned the value of identity and how our experiences that have passed shape who we are today. And that we will continue to grow and develop as our identity is fluid and is not a solid concept. A part of our identity comes from the archetypal symbols that have formed in our mind. These symbols are created through our experiences and will continue to change alongside our identities as people.



# Thank you

