

Assignment 5: Iconography and the Occult

“The Tarot embodies symbolical presentations of universal ideas, behind which lie all the implicits of the human mind, and it is in this sense that they contain secret doctrine, which is the realisation by the few of truths imbedded in the consciousness of all...”

–Arthur Waite, creator of the classic Rider-Waite-Smith tarot

Description:

There are few illustrated formats that express the depth of human experience like the tarot. The classic Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot was created from a centuries-old fortunetelling card game with varying iterations dating back to the 12th century. The 78 traditional “Tarot” cards known today as the Major and Minor Arcana, were compiled and given unique individual meanings by Arthur Waite, illustrated by Pamela Coleman Smith, and published by the Rider Company in 1909. Both Waite and Smith were then part of an occult secret society known as the [Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn](#). Other famous members include Aleister Crowley (creator of Thelema, the religious inspiration for modern Wicca), the Irish poet W.B. Yeats, Bram Stoker (author of Dracula), and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of Sherlock Holmes). Their use of oracle and tarot divination was part of their practice of occult and paranormal activities, with the goals of understanding more about the human condition, and the forces that drive humanity to good and evil. Each card in the Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot has a unique meaning, and features characters, objects, and symbols that are imbued with special meanings. Skilled tarot practitioners can “read” the cards, finding important connections between the visual elements in the cards, and the person getting the reading, similar to fortunetelling, a horoscope, or personality test. Countless iterations of the classic Tarot exist, and continue to be published, along with other unique “oracle” decks, which follow the divinatory function of the Tarot through card readings, but do not have the set card names and meanings of the Tarot. Any deck of cards with symbolic visual elements that correspond to human emotions or experiences can be considered an “Oracle” deck, but only decks that contain the 78 Major and Minor Arcana cards and reflect their original meanings are considered “Tarot” cards. For this assignment, you will be illustrating one card from the Major or Minor Arcana of the Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot. You will be re-envisioning a classic card, making any stylistic and compositional that you see fit, while maintaining the original name and meaning of the card you choose.

- ✦ **Format:** Tarot/Oracle Card Illustration
- ✦ **Dimensions:** 2.75 x 4.75 inches, 0.125 inch bleed, vertical orientation (making for a 3 x 5 inches canvas size with 2.75 x 4.75 inch trim size considered in the composition).
- ✦ **Final Delivery Specs:** 400 dpi, CMYK colour profile, PDF file with bleed settings on
- ✦ **Client:** a popular Tarot/Oracle Publisher (Red Feather, Lo Scarabeo, Llewellyn, Blue Angel)
- ✦ **Timeline:** 2 weeks (8-12 months for a deck)

- ✦ **Professional Fee:** \$2,500 (for the full deck) plus royalty escalator starting at 10%

Process:

Start by familiarizing yourself with the Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot. [Here's a good place to start](#) with the meanings of each card, the Major and Minor Arcana, and the four suits. Imagine what a complete deck of cards would look like and consider the following:

- ✦ What is the style you would use for these cards, given the efficiency needed in illustrating such a high quantity of cards?
- ✦ Given your style and the themes you work in, who would your intended audience be?
- ✦ What spiritual influences could you bring to the table that might be different from the Judeo-Christian imagery in Smith's original illustrations?
- ✦ How can you maintain the original meaning of each card with new symbolism?

You will be picking 3 cards to make sketches of, and narrowing your choice down to one card for the final. You might have a tarot deck at home and want to have a friend pull three cards for you as a spread, and use those three cards as your journey through both the reading and this assignment.

Part 1: Research and Sketch Development

Choose three cards to research in-depth. Create a Word/Google doc with the following for each card:

- 1) Card name and number (if it has one).
- 2) Keywords associated with the card.
- 3) 3-4 sentences that describe the overall meaning of the card.
- 4) A list of all of the imagery in Smith's original card illustration, including figures, objects, environments, text, and colours.
- 5) Notes on the most symbolic imagery in each card that drives the meaning of the card.

Through the thumbnail process, develop three strong sketches, one for each of your three different cards. Using drawn details and annotation in each sketch, outline the symbols, contextual clues, characters, and environment that fill each composition. The original meanings of each card should be apparent to anyone familiar with the Tarot. An important thing to remember in this Assignment specifically is the dimensions of the final artwork. The cards are quite small when printed at scale, so not a lot of information can (or should) be packed into them. Details will be lost if they are too small, and a card is not a large surface to scan when there are too many elements involved. Also, make sure that there is space considered in each sketch where the card name's text would be placed by the publisher's design team (as you will notice in all tarot/oracle decks, this should be a consistent design across all three sketches).

Bring the following to class in Week 9 to discuss with your classmates and instructor:

- 1) Your Word/Google Doc with description of the three cards you chose.
- 2) Three detailed and annotated sketches of possible compositions.

Part 2: Final Artwork

After determining the best sketch direction and any adjustments that should be made to it, choose one of your cards to create a final illustration for, and prepare a substrate that fits the format listed above, whether analog or digital. Analog finals must be scanned in and formatted to match the "Final Delivery Specs" listed above. Digital final artworks must be executed on a canvas matching the specs listed above, including a 0.125 inch bleed on all sides (making for a 3 x 5 inches canvas size with 2.75 x 4.75 trim size considered in the composition).

Execute the final artwork and prepare a digital image to show for presentation in class on Week 10. A short review and discussion of the work will take place, followed by directions on how to upload a PDF of process documents and final work to the Assignment 5 interface for grading.