

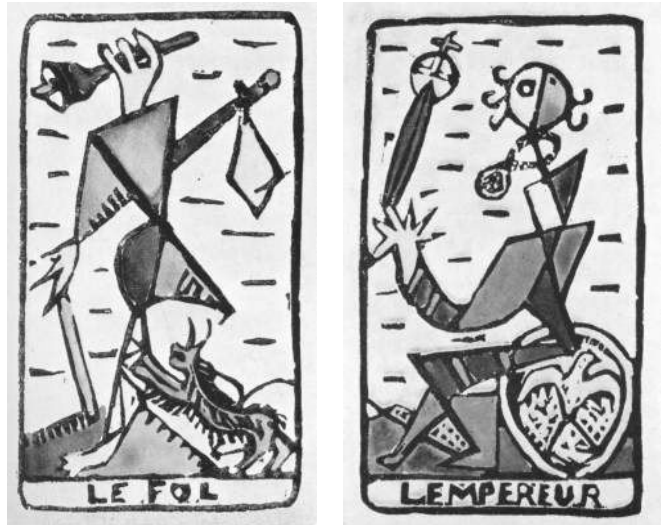
Adam McLean's Study Course on the artwork and symbolism of modern tarot



Lesson 23 : European Art Tarots

The European tarot tradition, particularly in France and Italy, has attracted many professional artists into creating an art tarot. Usually, though not exclusively, the artist will choose to work with the 22 Major Arcana and see this as a vehicle or structure for their artistic creativity. Rarely are they concerned to produce a deck that is intended for readings. Such art tarots are usually distributed as limited edition artworks rather than through tarot dealers, and can fetch incredible prices. They were often issued as a small edition of signed and numbered prints. An example is shown above, the Moon card from the German artist Hans Dorflinger's Tarot, a portfolio of 22 lithographs produced in 1975 in an edition of 74 signed copies.

The earliest of art tarots is probably that by the Russian Masjutin which we looked at in Lesson 21. Regrettably the original lithographs of this seem no longer locatable and may not have survived. The earliest Western European art tarot is possibly that of the French artist Jean Bertholle (1909-1996), best known for his abstract oil paintings. This was created around 1949 in a cubist style as coloured woodcuts. These were based on the familiar Tarot of Marseilles, but here the figures were deconstructed into cubist forms. These were apparently intended to be published by Audin in Lyons, but whether this ever appeared is unsure. The only record of these designs appears in the arts magazine *Graphis* for 1949 (issue No 26), but unfortunately the illustrations shown there are uncoloured.



Salvador Dalí's now famous and readily available tarot deck, was originally created as paintings/collages in the 1970's. A series of serigraphs (signed by Dalí) were issued not long after. The first printed edition as cards, as far as I know, was in 1984 and published in Spain by *Distribucions d'art surrealística* and the card-making company *Comos Naipes*.

Italian artists sometimes create art tarots to reflect an aspect of Italian history. An example of this is the *Tarocchi di Sigismondo*, a series of large polychromed woodcuts, produced by the artist and book illustrator Umberto Giovannini in 2003. The designs are a modern allegorical picturing of aspects of the life of the 15th century Italian nobleman Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, who was, among other things a patron of the arts (he commissioned Leon Battista Alberti to create his Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini and had Piero della Francesca decorate it with frescos. The tarot was produced as 99 signed copies and is beautiful though rather expensive.



In 2000 the Sicilian artist Pippo Madè created I Tarocchi Omaggio a Federico II to commemorate the life of the 13th Century Holy Roman Emperor who, though German, made his home at Palermo in Sicily from 1220 till his death in 1250. He was a great intellectual (founding the University of Naples in 1224), took a keen interest in science, astrology and astronomy and was a patron of the arts, especially poetry. He had a profound influence on Italian culture.



Pippo Madè created a full 78 card deck as a series of gouache paintings rich with

symbolism and imagery from Frederick's life. This was issued as large format cards, 9 by 5 inches (230x150mm). La Luna shows the astrological and astronomical interests of Frederick, while La Forza shows the creation of illuminated books and paintings that he sponsored. The Pip cards of the Minor Arcana depict tableaux of key aspects, events and influences on his life, that of Christianity, Saracen or Islamic influences, Jewish, Greek and his Germanic background.

One of the best known of the Italian art tarots is that of the printmaker Franco Gentilini. This is a relatively early tarot, dating to 1975. The original artwork was printed off of a series of large lithographic plates. Later these were issued as a tarot deck.

IL MATTO

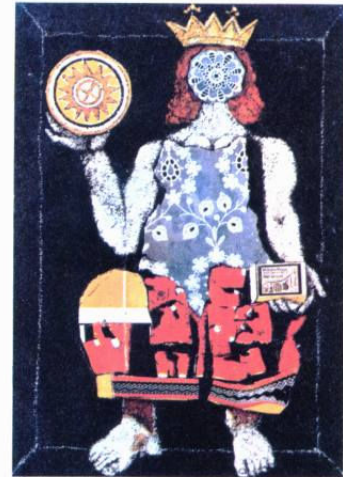


OLLIV MATTO II

LA LUNA



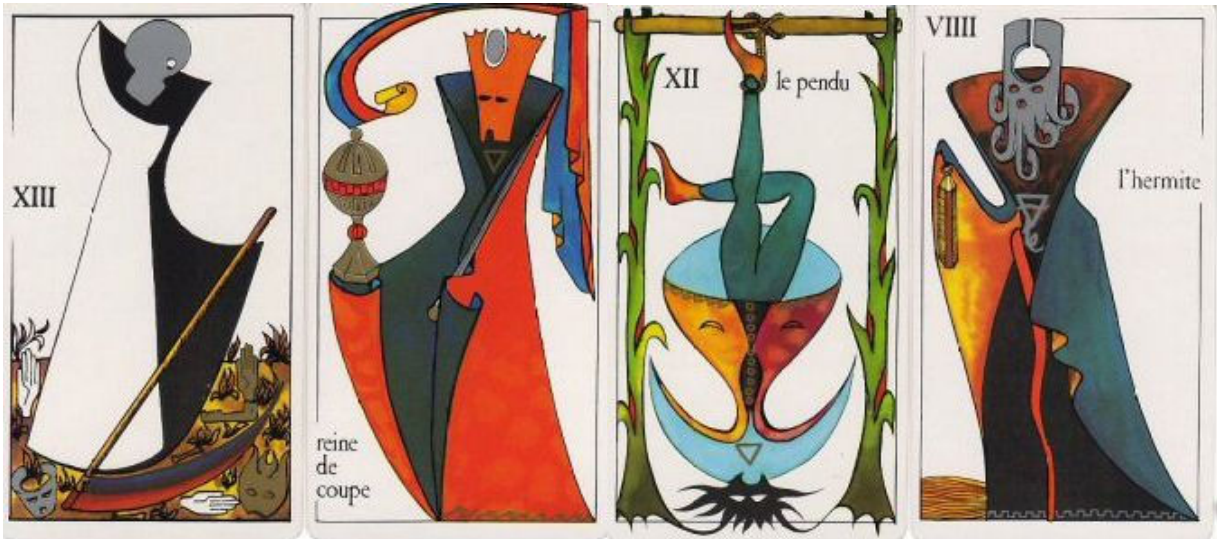
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There are many other Italian art tarots - those of Picini, Gianni Novak, Luciano Caruso, Manzoni, Franco Balan, Canosa, Capitani, Alessandro Baggi, Gambedotti, Mauro Garbarino, Guttuso, Prometti, Pitera, Viviani and many others known primarily as artists rather than as creators of tarot. Here are cards from the Canosa, Viviani and Prometti tarots.

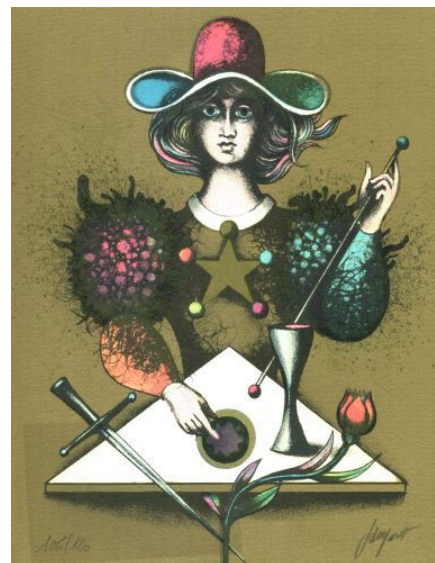
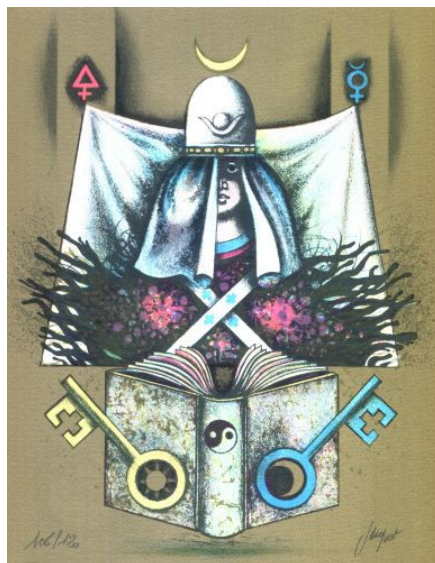


French artists also had a fine sense of style and often applied that to creating art tarots. Tarot imagery was to some extent a familiar part of the cultural landscape in France and not entirely associated with fortune telling so artists probably felt quite comfortable with the imagery. Among the best known and most beautiful is the Tarot de la Réa of Alain Bocher issued in 1982 and still available today from the artist.



Bocher creates his outlines from harmonised smooth curves and though reducing the representational elements to a bare minimum, the faces becoming masks and the bodies cloaks, he creates abstract designs which still retain sufficient figurative elements to keep the imagery accessible. For Bocher his tarot is about secrete things hidden within ourselves, and Réa is also the Greek Goddess Rhea, or Mother Earth. Bocher is an accomplished artist, sculptor and writer with a considerable interest in Tarot. He recently issued a book about the tarot mosaics in the Chateau des Avenieres.

Art tarots are sometimes issued as a portfolio of large prints. Among these is the almost unknown 22 tarot prints of Pierre Jacquot (1929-) - here 12.5x9.75ins (315x250mm) in size.



These are brightly coloured lithographs printed using opaque inks upon a dark golden coloured thick stock. The images seem to be hand drawn on the lithographic plate using litho crayon which makes the prints appear like crayon drawings. Most of the figures charmingly engage us with a direct gaze and the imagery is a stunning reworking of the traditional tarot arcana.

Another set of large prints is the Tarot Serigraphs of R.C. Though these are printed using silkscreen (serigraphy) the originals are obviously oil paintings using thin paint washes on canvas.

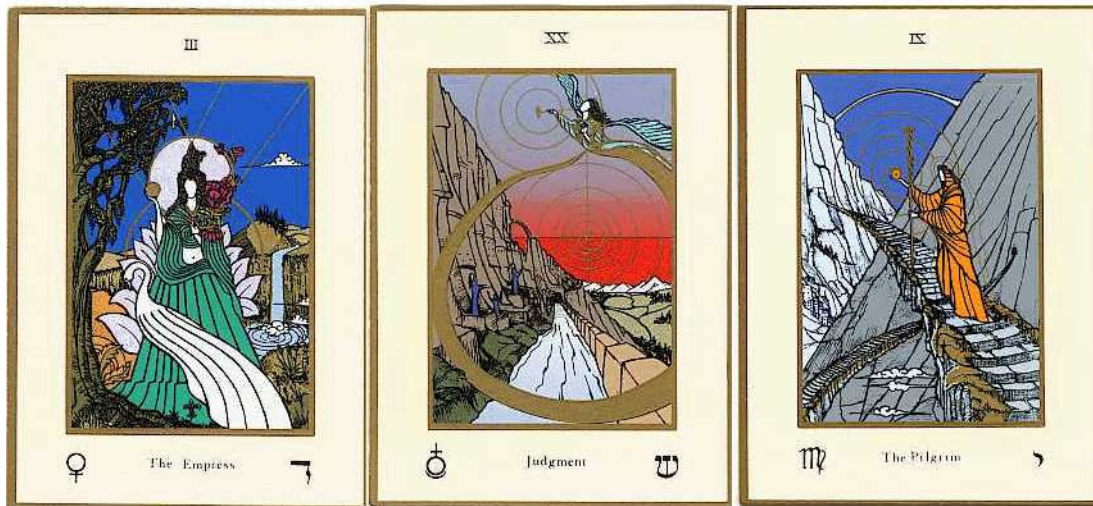


The imagery here is original with some Masonic influences - note the use of the Masonic code alphabet on the left bottom corner of each card.

No account of French tarot would be complete without mentioning the wonderful tarots produced by Pierrick Pinot. The print quality is excellent as he is obviously a master of hand printing and finishing. In 1983 he issued his famous Tarot l'Argolance, and in 1991 his Tarot de la Félicité. The Félicité follows closely the Tarot of Marseilles while the Argolance is an original reworking of the standard tarot imagery. Pinot produces large cards extremely finely printed on thick ivory boards and hand varnished.



Apart from the Italian and French artists there are many other European countries whose artists have created art tarots to include in even this short survey. First, we must think of the now very expensive Kashmir tarot by the Dutch artist Nicolaas C. J. van Beek published in 1984. The deck was printed, from van Beek's original paintings, by the Dutch printmaker Dik Al who used silkscreen printing with up to twenty colours to build each image. Nicolaas van Beek uses a complex geometrical construction to shape the forms for his cards. There appears to be also a strong Theosophical influence with the interweaving of Eastern and Western ideas and the artwork is reminiscent perhaps of the theosophist artist Nicholas Roerich. The faces of the figures are left blank. perhaps to raise them to a more archetypal status, rather than allowing us to engage directly with them.

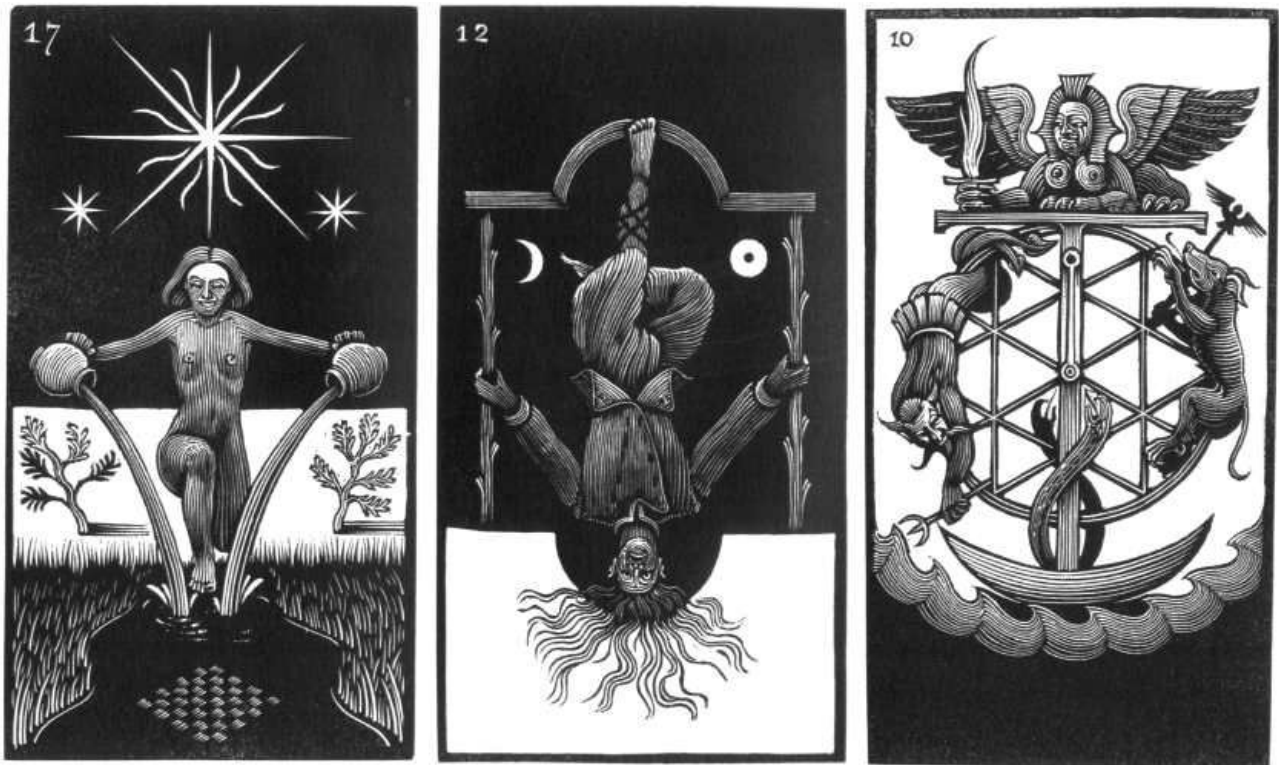


The Swiss artist Francoise Corboz produced her Tarot de Belmont major arcana deck in 1995. The artwork relies on her fine draughtsmanship and much of the card area is left showing her fine pen drawing but with some areas heightened in intense watercolour. The human figures are depicted with thin and elongated forms and the imagery is full of humour. The print quality is excellent allowing all the details of her pen work to show.



The name of this tarot is from the artist's home town, Belmont-sur-Lausanne, in the canton of Vaud, Switzerland.

Actual woodcut prints are rather rare nowadays, but the Prague based typographic artist, Frantisek Storm, in 2001 went to the effort of making woodcuts of the 22 major arcana. These have a delightfully clean line, as one might expect from a typographer. The incised lines themselves show the characteristic thinning towards the end of the stroke of the graver that one sees in quality wood engraving. Many of the designs are quite conventional with one or two interesting variations. Storm uses an interesting technique for modelling and shading the human figures which appear almost as contour lines.



A number of modern tarots are made to look like woodcuts though these are printed using conventional printing techniques. There are only a few woodcut tarots, among which is the *Tarocchi di Sigismondo* we looked at earlier, and three issued by the publisher Pheljna edizion' d'arte e suggestione, the *Tarocchi di Gambedotti* in 1982, that of *Giordano* in 1983 and the *Clizia* in 1985. These three were each printed out on a long sheet of paper folded concertina style.

Thus we see how European artists were able to pursue tarot, considering it only as a source of imagery, a lens to focus their artistic inspiration, rather than seeing their task as one of creating a divinatory or esoteric system.

To conclude, let us look at one of a series of prints of fine pencil drawings by the Austrian artist René Marcel Riviere made in 1987. These are large prints, 13 x 8.5 inches (325x 215mm). Here is the drawing for Strength. The artwork is in deliciously soft pencil beautifully modelled, though the style is on some cards rather brutal and often erotic.

