

Mail Artist's Tarot Deck 1998

Preface

For four years (1993-96) I organised an open mail art project called The Mail Artists' Tarot. This project was described in four fully illustrated documentary booklets distributed to the contributors and other interested parties. After four years a review of the project was appropriate. Meanwhile, I had gained experience from two quite different types of mail art project, one called Mail Artists' Trunk, where a limited number of artists were invited to decorate a cardboard template fitting into the small compartments of a trunk, made for another purpose, the other project being Mail Artists' Lenormand Deck, a modern version of the traditional cartomancy deck. The documentation of this project also took the form of a card deck. The concepts for these two projects were combined in Mail Artists' Tarot Deck 1998.



When starting the Mail Artists' Tarot-project, the end result in mind was the production of a so-called set of "tarot majors", a new artistic interpretation of the 22 allegorical images which, since the time of the Italian Renaissance, have constituted the most interesting part of the 78 tarot card deck. The 22 images have, during centuries, attracted hundreds of artists, and "tarot majors" in all possible artistic styles from elaborate Renaissance art to modernistic and non-figurative art came to light. Heavy cardboard cut to the exact size of the final cards was used for the templates which were sent with the invitations for the project. Each template carried the name of the respective card the artist was to contribute. The use of heavy templates was due to experiences I had gained from the Lenormand-project, where incoming photocopied templates, deviating from the original measures, made trimming the final decks awkward.

The selection of artists

I could have sent one template to 22 artists each, or two templates each to 11 artists. However, I wanted to expand the number of artists - there were so many more I would have liked to invite to join the project, but somewhere I had to set the limit. The templates, labelled with the assigned titles of the respective cards, were mailed in three rounds, allowing each artist four weeks from receipt 'til return of the works.

During three rounds about 40 artists were invited, a few did not want to contribute, some others had moved address so the templates didn't reach them. One artist sent his contributions so late after his 4 weeks deadline, that the defined cards were long ago transferred to others. After about four months I ended up with 66 contributions, three of each of the 22 cards, made by 33 artists from all over the world.

My original plan was to make a deck similar to the Mail Artist's Lenormand deck - laminated black and white photocopies - except this time it would coloured. I was, however, not entirely satisfied with the lamination solution, and wanted to avoid the glossy surface of the lamination, and yet make sturdy sets of usable cards. Experimenting with different methods of mounting, I finally discovered a hot mounting method, which, however, demanded investment in a laminator with hot rollers (instead of just a heating element).

The cards were colour-copied on 160 grams paper, four on a sheet, and the copier was adjusted so they received an extra silicon oil covering during copying. When finished, the sheets were hot mounted, using a special hot mounting foil, on black Chromolux cardboard, trimmed to exact size and corners rounded, one by one, using a special thong. Beware, however, this method is extraordinarily time consuming!

The documentation

As documentation for her/his partaking in the project each participant received a set of 22 cards including one of her/his own two contributions. The second card designed by the respective contributor was additionally included in the set also. The 22 cards were collated at random from the 66 available, only securing, of course, that there is one of each of the 22 titles included, and that there is not more than one card by the same artist. Using this method actually means that none of the decks in this "artists' edition" are exactly the same. To allow each contributor to see the entire range of the 66 cards, the accompanying booklet rendered all 66 cards in colour.

As was the case with the Mail Artists' Lenormand Deck, a very limited edition of the Mail Artists' Tarot Deck is offered for sale to art and tarot collectors. This "Collectors Limited Edition" of 25 signed packs is stored in a heavy cardboard box which includes all 66 different cards (actually three sets of "tarot majors") and has an accompanying booklet listing the respective artists' names along with a small colour illustration of their works. The size of the cards is 130x70. The cost of this limited edition is US\$170 inclusive postage and registration. Despite this high price, the income from the sale will not cover the expenses, not to mention the time.

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