

AN OFFERING OF LIGHT | THE ARCANAS SERIES: INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TAROT

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Judgement, XX, 40 x 40 in. Oil & metal leaf on canvas.

Light bounced off the walls and the shimmering metal leaf, sending flecks of light around the gallery and visitors. An excitement and wonder was in the air when I visited the Madelyn Jordon Fine Art Gallery for the first time. I immediately noticed the way small reflections clearly shined on visitors' faces as they drank in the paintings selected for Michelle Sakhai's solo exhibition of *THE ARCANAS SERIES: INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TAROT*.

Tarot is an ancient divination and the meanings behind it are part of a spiritual practice that is rooted in deep consideration of humanity, cycles of life, and time. The Major Arcana is an important and well known card series in the Rider-Waite Tarot deck. They speak to universal human experiences that Sakhai reimagines with her own interpretations. Tarot holds a spiritual significance for Sakhai, and she works to honor that importance in her work. Sakhai's interpretation of the Rider-Waite Major Arcana cards, created in the 1910s, offers a modern understanding that breathes new life into themes of human existence that withstand time - *Justice, Judgement, the Moon, the Star*.

This collection is the result of a year long project that Sakhai discussed during a gallery talk reception in late September. This is also her second solo exhibition with the Madelyn Jordon Gallery. Her affinity for attention to detail and thoughtfulness showed clearly in her work. Sakhai begins with gilding the canvas using metal leaf, then after varnishing, paints over the leaf with oils. Each brushstroke is part of a time-intensive process. Focused on light, energy, oils and metal leaf, Michelle delves into the timeless concepts recounted in 'The Fool's Journey.'

Sakhai developed her paintings with an intentionality that weaves together a story informed by, yet very different from the Major Arcana. Particularly *XIII*, an interpretation of the card for Death, provoked a luminescent, invigorating joy reminiscent of how the cool, blue ocean feels at the end of a hot day. Sakhai spoke about how Death is not just an ending, but a part of a cycle that harkens new beginnings, or needed closure. Michelle said, "I intuitively painted an infinity symbol without realizing it until the painting was completed. The colors and strokes just poured out of me. The energy of this card suggests completion, a release into something new. The Death card represents transformation and shedding of old skin. It's rarely about physical death. Through letting go of a core part of ourselves, experiencing grief, anger and pain, there is a profound change and opportunities for self-growth, self-awareness, and the birth of a new phase."

I was struck by her interpretation of death as part of a larger life cycle that connects all of humanity. This sense of rooting deeper into cyclical life patterns allowed for an interesting foray into the complexities of human existence.

Sakhai also spoke about how the balance of masculine and feminine energies in the cards informed her approach to the series. I was intrigued by how the combination of these energies with her use of vivid colors and textures led to a diversity of tones in each piece.

Of the selection, I was especially drawn to *Judgement*, with the careful placement of tiny cut pieces of metal leaf creating a multi dimensional aspect to the painting. Like many pieces in the series, *Judgement* was alight with contrast between the dark toned oils and bright gold metal leaf. This particular piece reminded me of the light, darkness, and mystery in a galaxy that goes beyond what the eye can see. It felt like the canvas moved as your eye traveled across the individual pieces of metal leaf, coalescing to reflect an almost swirling effect, as the leaf moves with the wind of people walking by the canvas.

All life continues on a rhythm, a cycle unseen by the naked human eye. In this series, the meticulous nature of Michelle Sakhai's interpretations unearth the complex truths of everyday humanity, both joyous and challenging, as told by the Major Arcana.

By translating the Major Arcana Tarot Cards into her own vision, Sakhai intends to both connect us back to the higher power and bring forth healing and peace within us. Michelle says, "This particular series is personal to me because the paintings reflect my own inner process with each card. The emotional experience, the physical, and the energetic while I was creating each piece. I was living each card." After her talk, I asked Michelle how she sees people connecting with her work even if they aren't familiar with Tarot. Her answer was simple. "Whoever connects with my paintings are those who were meant to."

THE ARCANAS SERIES: INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TAROT will be on view at Madelyn Jordon Fine Art until October 19, 2019.