

Japaridze Tarot

by NINO
JAPARIDZE

Text by Steve Lucas

SAMPLE

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Photographic reference has been used as inspiration for many of the characters used in these cards. However, any resulting resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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Japaridze Tarot – The Deck

Japaridze Tarot is a re-imagining of the Tarot universe through the visionary lens of Nino Japaridze, a leading contemporary Franco-Georgian artist. The overall structure of the deck is consistent with the majority of those that precede it. Nino has intended to position the imagery in a timeless setting unconfined by the domination of any single thematic emphasis. Each one of her paintings casts a new light on the topics and ideas each Tarot card traditionally represents.

While Japaridze Tarot does contain a few deviations from conventional Tarot structure, we expect that none should hinder its usage by experienced readers and those adherents familiar with other decks.

The titles of the Major Arcana are largely consistent with classical Tarot with only a few exceptions, which emphasize aspects of particular interest to the artist. The card commonly known as The Emperor is here presented as War, an intriguing commentary on the authoritarian and belligerent characteristics that controlling masculine energy may embody. In a similar vein, the card that has traditionally been designated as The Hanged Man is recast as The Drowned to emphasize its aquatic connotations with the unconscious.

In the Minor Arcana, the traditional suits of Swords, Wands, Cups and Pentacles correspond to the four Elements—these being Air, Fire, Water and Earth. Nino has

renamed these suits more overtly in accordance with their established elemental associations and thus we have the suits of Winds, Fire, Tides and Gardens.

Japaridze Tarot's most noticeable departure from customary Tarot lies within the Court Cards of the Minor Arcana. While the time-honored Queen and King have been retained, in this deck they are preceded by the Jester and the Stranger, two universal archetypes who take the place of the more familiar Page and Knight. These cards retain many, though not all, of their conventional associations.

We hope Japaridze Tarot is as well received by the Tarot community as its images have been embraced by the art world. Our goal has been to be mindful of Tarot tradition but not slavish or imitative to it while allowing Nino maximum freedom in her artistic interpretation and vision of Tarot's incredibly rich history.

The Road to Japaridze Tarot

In 2008 I had the good fortune to meet Nino Japaridze while attending an opening at the same Parisian gallery where she herself had regularly exhibited for many years. We were both invited to a nearby restaurant for a dinner following the *vernissage* where we had the opportunity to speak a bit. Her personality seemed to remarkably combine both spontaneous and guileless qualities with a ferocious intelligence and the wisdom and depth of an "old soul".

On my subsequent journey to Paris I secured an invitation to visit Nino at her studio where she showed me an extraordinary series of drawings in progress. At that time I did not know that Nino, who had painted and exhibited on a regular basis for virtually her entire life since childhood, had only just begun to make art again after a hiatus of nearly two years. Nor was I aware just how different these drawings were from almost everything she had done before. What was conspicuously evident, however, was the originality of these haunting images and their piercing, even disturbing, visionary power.

So piercing and disturbing, in fact, that upon first seeing them Nino's gallery was concerned with how radically different they were from the more realistic Orientalist paintings that had been so successful for so long. Nino was confident in these new works and she knew she had tapped into something true and deep within herself that she had previously not been able to access or express. An amicable agreement was reached wherein Nino and her new works would be exhibited under more sympathetic and suitable representation.

Talk about being in the right place at the right time! Our gallery in New York City specializes in vintage surrealism mostly by artists who have passed away years ago and represents only a handful of contemporary artists. It is quite difficult to find quality artists now working in a surrealist or fantastic milieu whose works are not overly derivative of what has been done before and is already quite familiar.

With Nino having found her authentic artistic voice and being blessed with an abundance of imagination and technical ability, I was eager and excited to present her work. Our collectors responded as enthusiastically as I might have dared envision.

I first proposed to Nino the idea of her creating works for a Major Arcana of the Tarot in early 2011. The previous year had been extremely productive for the artist. She had completed her first portfolio of four hand-colored etchings, *L'Eternel Retour*. These, along with works from her major drawing cycles of 2008-2009, were premiered at her first museum exhibition held in Paris' Palais de Tokyo in May 2010. Following that show in October was her first exhibition of new oils on canvas in four years. This hypnotic series of paintings were elaborate and chromatic interpretations of several of the images from the breakthrough drawing cycles that had so consumed her over the previous two-and-a-half years.

Nino proceeded to research Tarot and its history and produced one very interesting study in white ink on black paper. However, she soon concluded that the time was not yet right for her to pursue her Tarot visions. She instead began work on her second etching portfolio, *The Master and Margarita*, based on the classic twentieth century novel by Bulgakov. Preparatory drawings and the engraving of the etching plates occupied her through autumn of 2011 when the first impressions of the new etchings were pulled. Unlike *L'Eternel Retour*, for which the artist had

hand colored only selected portions of each image, Nino decided to fully and elaborately paint the entire image of each and every etching in *The Master and Margarita's Deluxe Edition*. Every single impression demanded 8-10 hours to hand color, which resulted in many months of work. After finally completing this daunting undertaking, Nino found herself with the desire and readiness to begin a new project that would not only allow but *require* her to flex her creative muscles to the fullest.

The reader can only begin to imagine my delight and excitement the day I first received Nino's email containing a digital photograph of her nearly completed image of The Star. Japaridze Tarot had begun! The Moon painting soon followed and Nino was off and running. In the days that followed, Nino and I engaged in long discussions about Tarot in general and the painting currently underway in particular. I particularly relished the thrill of alternating senses of complicity and surprise each time Nino presented her completed vision of a previously discussed theme in a manner and form as unexpected as it was brilliant.

About a half a year later the paintings of the Major Arcana were nearing completion. The series of works was being met with an extraordinarily high level of enthusiasm by all of the preliminary viewers in the planning of the exhibition. Our project was additionally and deeply blessed to come to the attention of legendary authority in all things Tarot, Stuart Kaplan, who expressed his admiration. An agreement was quickly reached wherein Japaridze

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