

'It's all in the cards'

Scarsdale gallery to host 'Interpretations of Tarot' exhibit

By [MARY WALRATH](#) August 21, 2019



Michelle Sakhai

New York City artist Michelle Sakhai is bringing her abstract art to Scarsdale in a never before seen way. Her yearlong painting project, “The Arcana Series: Interpretations of Tarot” will be assembled into one comprehensive exhibition for the first time at Madelyn Jordon Fine Art from Sept. 6 to Oct. 19.

The images are based on the classic Rider-Waite tarot card deck, which is full of imagery many people will recognize, even if they don't know where the art is from. It is the most popular and well-recognized deck in the history of tarot — a form of divination that originated in the mid-15th century in Italy and was popularized throughout Europe. Though tarot cards were often used for gameplay and weren't connected to the occult and fortune telling until

around the 17th to 18th century, most people today are familiar with the novelty of tarot card readings meant to tell fortunes or reveal deep truths about personal lives.

Tarot's roots in spirituality and divinity have not been lost to many people over the years, however, and Sakhai said her art is intended to honor the interpretations of the cards that are still considered sacred to many.



'Wheel of Fortune'
Courtesy Miskai Studios'

“The tarot cards are something I’ve been inspired by for several years now,” said Sakhai. “Each card represents the joys and sorrows we all experience, and progressions of them represent the soul's evolution as we all experience here on earth from a baby to an elder.”

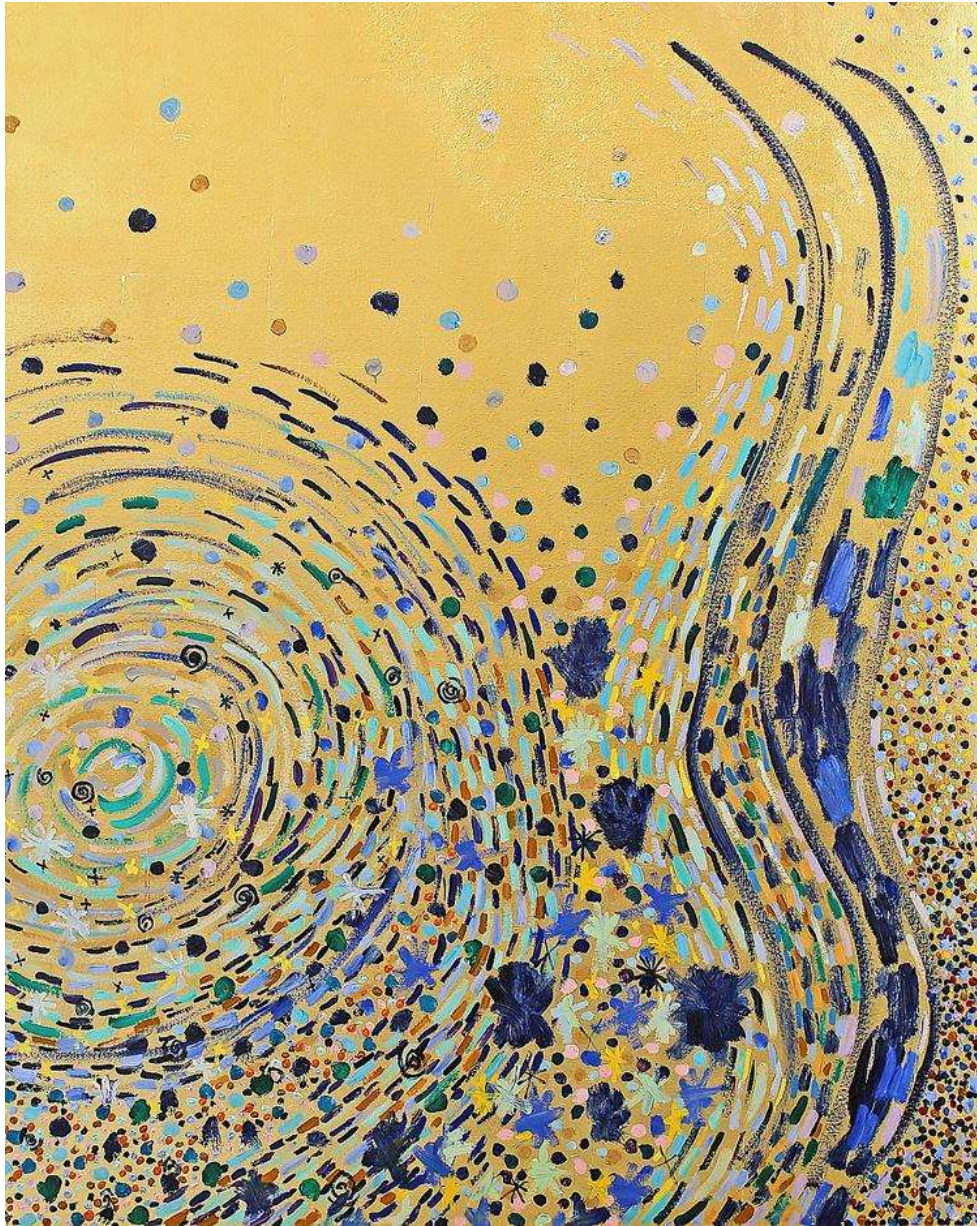
Sakhai described the Major Arcana deck as have an arcing storyline that spans the 22 cards, starting with the naive fool and following him as he learns, grows and makes his way through life. These major cards tell the story of humanity's evolution and enlightenment to Sakhai, and she feels that people can connect to both the original cards and her art regardless of whether they've ever been involved with tarot before or not.

"It's just about creativity and being something hopefully everyone can connect with regardless of if you're spiritual or believe in tarot or not," said Sakhai. She said it took her a year to make the images because she made them as she was going through and experiencing each one individually in her life.

"The inspiration was to share my experiences and connect with everyone on their own level and energetically. I think people do connect with these cards in a deeper way subconsciously."

Though Sakhai chose the most recognizable tarot imagery as her inspiration, viewers should not expect to see direct recreations of the original art. Instead, Sakhai said, she used her existing experience in abstract painting to create images that reflect the "energy" of the cards as opposed to stylizing the existing illustrations.

"She recreated them in her own personal style and redid the imagery, which is originally representational as opposed to Michelle's work, which is primarily abstract," said studio owner Madelyn Jordon. "Because she's using her metallics, it also relates to light and the energy and a reflective quality to add to the meaning and power of the cards in her own visual language."



'The Magician' Courtesy Miskai Studios'

Jordon referred to a piece titled “The Wheel of Fortune” as an example of Sakhai’s abstract style. The original card features a wheel that looks similar to a clock face adorned with several types of symbology. Surrounding the wheel are clouds and creatures perched atop and around them, including a sphynx, snake, lion, bull, eagle and angel.

Sakhai’s version of the card represents the swirling, cyclical feeling of a wheel turning as it swirls colors together in a spiraling, circular motion. It is painted in the center of the canvas and simulates a sense of motion, something Jordon described as seeming mystical and bursting from the canvas.

“Instead of it being so literal, I decided to express more of what the card emotionally and energetically means to me, which is pretty much about change and cycles and the events that are inevitable and of course luck,” said Sakhai. “To me the card really represents the universe because it explains what moves the stars, what lifts the sun every day, who controls the seasons and that is what I was trying to express in my painting. It’s so much beyond us and humanity.”



'The Lovers'
Courtesy Miskai Studios'

Besides working with the images of tarot cards directly for more than a year, Sakhai also described having been interested in spirituality from the time she was a child when she entered bookstores and retreat directly to the spiritual and self-help sections to amass books she couldn't even understand yet. As an adult, her rediscovery of this stash, among other interests, drew her into a world of spiritual guidance that often involved techniques like tarot.

“Making these pieces was really an interesting experience because ... these cards made me dig deeper to touch those places where sometimes we don't want to go because it can be scary,” said Sakhai. “Some of the cards are not just all sun and sunshine and happiness, it's also trials, tribulations, and sorrow and pain and guilt and hurt and expressing something deeper.”

The exhibition will be the first time either Sakhai or Jordon see all of the pieces together as one. Jordon said the gallery intends to have a tarot reader visit the exhibition to read for guests on Sept. 21, as well as an opening reception on Sept. 6.