

Anna Colwill
Every Stitch is a Seed

The Hierophant

The hierophant is a tarot card that represents inherited traditions, dogma or 'status-quo'. In Ancient Greece, the role of a hierophant was to be the channel through which communications from the divine were received, translated and passed on to the common people. The hierophant was the only person who could understand these messages, and so held the 'key' to divine wisdom.

Disabled people have, for a long time, been given pathological language, created by the hierophant of the medical industrial complex, to describe our embodied experience. Before that, disabilities might be attributed to the mystical, but in a way that was othering and dehumanising.

When we pull this card, we are invited to assess which of the dogma we have been allotted is still true for us, and to recognise that we alone can be the ultimate hierophant for ourselves - only we can form sacred narrative in the chaos of our lived experience. We, not medical professionals, are the ones who can begin to interpret the arcane knowledge held in our bodies.

The reason that my practice, the learning and doing of crafts, the crafting of meaning, is important to me, is because it is doing just that: creating a new way of processing and communicating my experiences; one which does not place the knowledge of my body as secondary to that of my brain. Which accepts that the two were never separate to begin with.

Crafting Ecologies

The handmade pieces included in this installation are all using crafts that are, to some degree, new to me. Learning new crafts is something I do frequently, almost cyclicly, in my practice. This is, in part, because it mirrors the emergence that happens in nature, the groundwork of root systems - theory and first meetings with new materials and practical knowledge grow into awkward, wonky shoots, then buds, flowers and fruit. Once the fruit has provided nourishment (the crafting process has created something) the cycle starts again. When I have spent a season learning a craft, that curiosity is eventually reignited with another. This does not mean that the relationship to these craft practices is over - each new craft I learn is supported by the ecosystem of crafts I have already learned, like trees connected by underground mycelium, who communicate and offer nutrients to those who need help to grow.

Rituals of Becoming

This attraction to root systems also led me to research my family tree, around half of which comes from Cornwall. Cornwall has a rich history of pagan traditions, including Pellar, who are magical practitioners. The following information was learned from the book 'Traditional Witchcraft: a Cornish Book of Ways' by Gemma Gary. The Pellar (who still exist in smaller numbers today) are animists, believing that the land is a living thing, and it is from

relationship to the land that they derive their power.

They call the spiritual power, that they use for the benefit of themselves and their community, Sprowl, Sarf R uth, or the Red Serpent. This is collected in the Pellar's body or the staff (notably, a mobility aid as well as a magical tool) through various methods - often, by spending time in certain 'between places' that are thought to hold power. This is known as 'walking the Serpent Path.'

Another way to collect Sprowl is through the use of a Mazey Stone (aka. a Troy Stone), a flat stone with a labyrinth symbol (as pictured in my square lace piece) carved into it. The practitioner would sit in a dark room with a single candle and run their finger around the maze continuously while swaying and humming. To work with Sprowl, one needs to enter a trance-like liminal state of consciousness known as 'Becoming', in which '[t]he witch becomes more acutely aware of not only the physicality of their surroundings but the the spiritual or ethereal reality of 'all', both in spirit and in physicality, to the furthest reaches.' 'Mazey' refers not just to the maze but to the intoxication that using the stone was meant to induce. Gary says: 'All repetitive movements and tasks are helpful, turning the consciousness away from the everyday, rational world, to a place between the worlds.'

To me, this spoke specifically to how my craft practice serves as a somatic ritual which is healing and energising. It is not simply something I do for results (although those are a bonus), but as a commitment to an ongoing relationship with all beings, whether that is my childhood best friend, from whose garden I harvested the sedge for my twine, baskets and mandalas, the plants I foraged and used to dye the

fabrics, or the cuttlefish whose bones I collected on the beach for my altar.

Listen to an audio recording of this essay here:

