

Title: ECOTarot

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Overview: The ECOTarot deck enables us to perform “Climate Future” readings. With the deck, we invite others to join us to “channel” scientific facts and modelled projections related to human-driven climate disruption through the layered form and meanings of tarot.

Objective/Essence: Create a safe space for people to have a moment of acknowledgement, and hopefully healing, of their emotions towards the climate crisis. Catalyze a conversation regarding our shared future, while offering support and encouragement to people for the role they can play in it.

Time: 15-30 minutes

Group size: 1 on 1 reading

Materials: a deck of ECOTarot cards, interpretative text, climate reading script, a notebook

Location: any location (although it’s especially nice to be outdoors)

From the artist:

As an artist, I ask myself what role I can possibly play – how can I best contribute to what is needed at this time? Since seemingly incontrovertible facts exist and they are not, in and of themselves, instigating the social and political will needed to transform our culture, in what direction can we turn? Perhaps one factor is that no matter the historical record, in the end we can’t know with certainty what the future holds? Perhaps change is difficult to initiate and sustain because of the gulf that exists between our individual actions and the collective action needed in order to have a real effect?

I was troubling through these questions and more at my beloved high desert studio during a leave from my academic position during the Fall/Spring 2014-15. Toward the end of the Spring, while attending a walking/writing/drawing workshop in Italy led by artist Angela Ellsworth and writer Tania Katan, I gestated the ECOTarot project. My original notes from May 2015 lay the basis for a good deal of what this project has become: the performance “mash-up” of ecological symbols and memes with the meanings and interpretations of the symbolically rich tarot; the use of animal symbols; and the utilization of natural pigments (my first prototype card was embellished with yellow clay harvested while walking on a wooded Tuscan path).

I dedicate the ECOTarot deck and climate future readings to my mother, Carol. A professional psychic for many years, she offered tarot and palmistry readings to individual clients and at group events. I trace my own acknowledgement of a spiritual realm to growing up in her household. As her child I learned that the stars and planets had power and influence, that dead people visit us, and that there is another world that can’t be seen but can be felt and experienced.

As a teen who strongly identified with rational thought and logic, I berated my mother mercilessly for her beliefs. Yet as an adult, in need of guidance and access to my intuition, I picked up the tarot. It is one of many “guidance systems” I have used over the years to assist me as I navigate life.

Over time, I have discovered that the cards don't tell us anything we don't already know. Rather, they shuffle and shift our ideas and beliefs – reinforcing our current thinking about a question or life circumstance, or bringing to the foreground a previously obscured possibility or perspective. I approach my “climate future” readings as improvisational street performance – extending my long-term artistic commitments to both creative improvisation and publicly encountered and engaged art.

After performing hundreds of readings throughout the US and recently, in Europe and South America, I envision the practice extending beyond myself. My greatest hope is that amateur tarot readers aligned with the ecological values embedded in the deck (maybe you?!) will pick up the practice, and be moved to offer readings publicly or within their social circles. Thank you in advance for making these many conversations about our climate and our place in it possible!

How to prepare:

Knowledge

Familiarise yourself with the script and the interpretative text in advance. Learn about the locality you will be performing the readings in, and about the specific issues regarding climate change/sea health that that community is facing.

Space

Create a thoughtful environment for the reading, simple (to be set up quickly) but at the same time in connection to the earth. The “mesa”, or the table/floor space where you are performing the reading, is a temporary space that is capturing the engagement with the Seeker (the person you are doing the reading for). You can think of it as a “magic circle”. For this reason, it is important to make it special in a way that is unique to you, that has meaning for you in relation to the earth or sea. You can think about how you can evoke a connection to the earth and to the elements through the items you bring into the space.

Yourself (the Reader)

Choose something to identify yourself as the Reader. It can be anything, a pin, or a hat, or sash. Similarly, to the space, the important thing is to render the moment special and to help you take on the role.

Moreover, it is important to be in a certain mental space during the reading. A focused state, a space of attention that allows you to be careful and thoughtful. It is not necessary to be surrounded by quiet, but more importantly to be focused in the moment and aligned with the purpose. Your goal is to create a safe space of deep listening for the Seeker to share and connect, and in doing so you are welcoming their feelings and thoughts, positive or negative, or their silence as well. It is crucial to know this, and be prepared for it.

Step-by-step instructions:

- 1) Seat in the space you have set up, a thoughtful environment that evokes nature/magic. A piece of palo santo wood (or other local dried plant for purification) and matches or a lighter are also placed near as are the interpretive text and a notebook (to jot down notes or things you want to remember)
- 2) Greet the Seeker warmly, introduce yourself by name and learn name of Seeker
- 3) Perform the reading with the help of the script

READING OUTLINE (2-card spread)

Preamble

- ◊ Have you ever had a tarot reading?
- ◊ Tell about ECOTarot (difference with standard and cards)
- ◊ Lighted herb blessing on cards, person, yourself

Reading

- ◊ Shuffle cards (ask person to direct you if online)
- ◊ Divide deck in 2 (with their direction)
- ◊ Take a breath, place hands on cards and center yourself for reading
- ◊ Tell them about meaning of card #1 position, explain that you need minor arcana card
- ◊ Turn over card #1 (turn cards until you get minor arcana cards, place major arcana or court cards below)
- ◊ Tell them about meaning of card #2 position, explain that you need major arcana or court card
- ◊ Turn over card #2 (turn cards until you get major arcana or court cards, place minor arcana cards below)
- ◊ Tie the cards together (point out directionality, common themes, etc)
- ◊ If time, interest read the background cards placed below

3) Ask the Seeker permission to take a picture in order to remember the reading

4) Thank the Seeker for their time and interest



Figure: ECOTarot reading (presented at the Baltic Sea Lab panel. Image credit: Adriene Jenik and Department of Seaweed).

Tips for the Reader: You can view the reading as an improvisational performance. Don't feel too much bound by the given interpretation of the cards, instead let them unlock your knowledge. At the same time, observe how the Seeker is responding and try to tune into it, reacting to what people themselves see in the cards. The card is just a card, it is about how people relate to it. Try not to impose judgement on it. Finally, know that it is alright to be scared or nervous at the beginning! It can help to practice with known and friendly people at first.

Variations: Once you are familiar with the tarot and the reading method, feel free to experiment with it. You can come up with your own custom spreads for example. Test, iterate and explore the possibilities!

More information: see Adriene Jenik presenting the ECOTarot project at the Baltic Sea Lab panel: How creative practices can support sea health
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y027kvzu4y8>

ECOTarot deck
<https://theconnectcenter.asu.edu/ecotarot-deck>

