

# THE FIRST ARCANUM

ARCHETYPES  
VISIONS  
SYMBOLS  
BESTIARIES  
MYTHOLOGIES  
ENIGMAS



MONOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION  
THE ENGRAVER AND PRINTMAKER  
MARINELLA CASLINI

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BY THE ENGRAVER AND PRINTMAKER  
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20 DECEMBER 2025 – 6 JANUARY 2026  
AT LALMA CAFÉ, MONTEPULCIANO

Welcoming this journey is Lalma Café, in the heart of Montepulciano: not only a specialty coffee shop offering coffees and teas from around the world, but also a vibrant space for art and culture—a place of encounter and reflection, where care for ingredients and care for images share the same idea of quality. In this context, the exhibition becomes an experience: an invitation to enter a small symbolic world, where a taste for beauty meets the art of attention.

## THE EXHIBITION

“The First Arcana” is an exhibition born of a long span of time: that of patient study, close observation, and engraving as a meditative gesture. Marinella Caslini (b. 1986) is an artist, graphic designer, printer, and engraver. She trained in painting at the Duccio di Buoninsegna Art Institute in Siena and specialized in fine art printmaking at the Il Bisonte International School in Florence.

In 2013 she founded DisGrafica Atelier, a studio in which graphic design, illustration, and fine art printing coexist as a single language. Alongside her artistic practice, a strong drive toward dissemination has grown: from videos dedicated to printmaking to the self-produced podcast *Via della Stamperia*, with the aim of sharing techniques, experiences, and knowledge from an ancient craft that remains deeply relevant today. This Tarot project arises from the same necessity: to bring to light a path of research that is not only iconographic, but also historical, philosophical, and personal.

The title “I Primi Arcani” clearly indicates that this is a work in progress: the construction of a complete deck of Major Arcana has not yet been completed. On view are the first nine works of this journey—nearly five years of study of the subject—presented as the opening chapters of a broader narrative destined to continue. Each image is created “to the measure” of the technique: not a quick illustration, but an original engraving, in which thought settles into the plate and resurfaces on paper with slowness and precision.



The initial spark is the Tarot of Marseille: a historical “standard,” made famous by editions attributed to Nicolas Conver (18th century) and by the subsequent work of reconstruction and restoration carried out in the 1990s by Alejandro Jodorowsky and Philippe Camoin. Faced with such a deeply stratified symbolism, Caslini chooses a clear path: not to “reinterpret” in order to force meaning, but to allow the cards to reveal themselves in the language most congenial to her. That language is nature—particularly animals as totemic, archetypal, and ambivalent presences—and the means are drawing and engraving. From this emerges a personal “way” that does not erase tradition: it passes through it, listens to it, and returns it as a contemporary vision.





## TAROT AND PRINTMAKING

Tarot cards originated in Europe between the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, with origins that most studies place in 15th-century Italy. At first they were playing cards: luxury objects intended for the courts, often hand-painted, and tied to an allegorical imagery celebrating virtues, powers, and “triumphs.”

Historian Andrea Vitali notes that the game’s earliest name, *Ludus Triomphorum*, recalls the Petrarchan tradition of the “Triumphs”: a sequence of moral and cosmic images that speak of human destiny and the relationship between humanity and the divine.

With the spread of printmaking, the iconography became standardized and multiplied. Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the Tarot of Marseille emerged as a reference point thanks to French workshops that engraved woodblocks (for example in pearwood) and colored the cards with stencils: a “serial” production that did not eliminate craftsmanship, but made it repeatable and transmissible. It is precisely this repetition—with its small variations, errors, and linguistic and graphic evolutions—that makes Tarot a living organism, capable of adapting to the times and cultures that host it.

From the 19th century onward, with the rise of esoteric and occult interests, the cards were reread in an initiatory key; in the 20th century, depth psychology emphasized their archetypal dimension; today, many practices coexist: historical study, contemporary art, introspection, divination, and collecting. Across this long arc, printmaking remains central, because Tarot—before being a “system”—is a reproduced image, and therefore a technical gesture, a decision of mark, and a relationship between matrix and paper. Marinella Caslini’s work belongs here: not as quotation, but as a conscious continuation of a graphic tradition in which each card is, quite literally, a print.

## THE MAJOR ARCANA: SEMANTIC AND SYMBOLIC INTERPRETATIO

The First Arcana comprise 22 figures in a traditional deck and can be read as a visual grammar of archetypes. Each card is an essential yet densely charged scene: garments, colors, gestures, animals, objects, directions of gaze, and imperfect symmetries.

Nothing is neutral. This is why Tarot endures over time: it does not deliver a single, fixed message, but a field of resonances. Each image speaks on multiple levels—ethical, mythological, cosmological, psychological.

From a semantic point of view, the Major Arcana do not merely describe “characters” or “events”: they represent functions of consciousness and passages of human experience. Le Mat is undirected energy and openness to possibility; La Justice is dynamic balance and measure; L’Hermite is withdrawal and knowledge that illuminates the past; Le Pendu is a reversal of perspective and inner gestation; L’Arcane Sans Nom is radical transformation; La Lune is the path of imagination and shadow; La Stella is generative presence hic et nunc. In these images, the great themes converge: birth and death, strength and surrender, choice and destiny, light and darkness, individual and community, time and change.

Caslini’s work brings a crucial aspect to the fore: nature as a symbolic language. Animals are not decoration, but “keys” that condense psychic and cosmic qualities—the fox, ostrich, deer, bear, owl, raven, elephant, snail/nautilus, octopus. They are ambivalent, ancient, cross-cultural figures, inviting a reading that does not seek to “explain everything,” but rather guides the gaze toward what the image activates. In this sense, rather than predicting the future, the Arcana help decipher the present: they offer a symbolic map for thinking, feeling, and choosing.



## LE MAT

Le Mat is the first threshold: primordial energy, movement without direction, a freedom that escapes any definition.

In the Tarot of Marseille, the reading of Le Mat also depends on the surrounding cards: it may “flee” or draw closer in order to deliver its charge.

Here, the animal pushes from past toward future, transforming what has been into vital impulse.

The fox—an unpredictable, mercurial guide—moves through myths and bestiaries as a figure of intuitive intelligence, capable of navigating between opposing worlds and accompanying humanity through passages of consciousness.



## ARCANO o



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle natural white 350 g

Year: 2022

Edition: Artist's Proof



## LE PAPE

The Pope is knowledge that becomes transmission: teaching as initiation, the word as a bridge.

It is the first Arcana in which the self opens to the other: two disciples listen and embody different paths of learning.

The deer is a symbol of revelation and transcendence, a creature that renews its antlers and crosses worlds; in Christian bestiaries it alludes to Christ, while in more ancient traditions it evokes cyclicity and spiritual guidance



## ARCANO V



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle light white 350 g

Year: 2025

Edition: Artist's Proof



# LA JUSTICE

Justice is completeness: material and spiritual stability together. Its balance does not coincide with perfect symmetry; small deviations (the tilted scale, the differing columns) remind us that life is not immobility.

The card poses a concrete question: are we doing justice to ourselves and to others?

The ostrich has accompanied this figure for centuries: from the feather of Ma'at in ancient Egypt to interpretations in medieval bestiaries and writings as far back as Pliny, it becomes an image of meditation before judgment.



# ARCANO VIII



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle light white 350 g

Year: 2020

Edition: Artist's Proof



## L'HERMITE

The Hermit chooses crisis as a passage: he leaves the known world, accepts darkness, and prepares a new cycle.

In Tarot, the left side signifies the past and the right the future: the raised lantern illuminates what has been, while the future is deliberately left in shadow.

The octopus, a creature of the depths—intelligent and solitary—renounces the shell in favor of fluidity; its form evokes the spiral and the vortex, symbols of dissolution and creation, of a totality in motion.



## ARCANO IX



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle light white 350 g

Year: 2020

Edition: Artist's Proof



## LA FORCE

Strength is a new beginning: creative energy rising from below, bringing instinct and intellect into dialogue.

In the Marseille model, the female figure masters the beast without violence: strength here is not imposition, but active listening to the inner animal.

The bear, a widespread totem in Northern Europe and associated with Artemis, represents power, primal matter, and vital impulse: what is dark and primordial can become a source of light.



# ARCANO XI



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle light white 350 g

Year: 2024

Edition: Artist's Proof



# LE PENDU

The Hanged Man looks at the world from another axis: chosen immobility, suspension as gestation.

He cuts ties and makes space for inner work that does not aim at conquering the heavens, but at an earthly and compassionate transformation. Minute symbols (moons, circles, knots) speak of spiritual androgyny, invisible ladders, and Kabbalistic references: reversal is not loss, it is initiation.

The owl, a bird of the night and of vision in darkness, becomes an emblem of awareness: bringing to light what is obscure without fleeing from it.



## ARCANO XII



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle natural white 350 g

Year: 2021

Edition: Artist's Proof



## L'ARCANESANS NOM

The Nameless—often called “Death”—is positive transformation: the scythe clears away, prepares new ground, and rebirth is already visible.

Within the iconography appear references to the Divine Name and to the measure of divinity within the human: exact half, threshold, incarnation.

The raven recalls the alchemical nigredo: dissolution, putrefaction, the beginning of change. The end becomes a service to eternity: without an ending, there is no beginning.



# ARCANO XIII



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle natural white 350 g

Year: 2020

Edition: Artist's Proof



# LE TOILLE

The Star is generosity: it receives and gives in total communion with the environment, *hic et nunc*.

The title “LE TOILLE” reproduces a historical inscription found in early decks (such as that of François Tourcaty, 1745) and recalls how Tarot also lives through errors, evolutions, and shifts in language and meaning.

The elephant emphasizes fertility and blessing: in Hindu traditions, the water libations poured by elephants over Gaja Lakshmi resonate with the double stream of water that the Star pours into the world.



# ARCANO XVII



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle natural white 350 g

Year: 2019

Edition: Artist's Proof



## LA LUNE

The Moon is receptive and changeable power: a guide to nature's dark side, linked to water, tides, and cycles.

In alchemy it is a volatile and multiple principle. The lunar path is intuition, imagination, and magic, but also restlessness and the unknown.

The black and white dogs mark the rhythm of time; the crab/cancer signifies regeneration and inconstancy. The snail/nautilus, a spiral marine creature, becomes a perfect image of lunar cycles: rebirth, evolution, and return.



## ARCANO XVIII



Technique: etching and aquatint

Plate: 200 × 100 mm

Paper size: 350 × 250 mm

Paper: Hahnemühle natural white 350 g

Year: 2022

Edition: Artist's Proof