

Interview: Christine Filipak



Christine Filipak is one half of the driving and creative force behind Monolith Graphics. With her seemingly limitless talent - as a graphic designer, fine artist, and editor - Christine began working with Joseph Vargo in 1992, and since then she has taken her tenacity, talent, and creativity, to a level most can only dream of.

Since then Christine has been one busy woman. In 1997, she and Joseph opened a fantasy art gallery, "The Realm," and in 1998, the company Web site went online. The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Then, in 2003, with much research and inspired by various mythologies, the entrancing gothic-with-a-splash-of-art-nouveau "Madame Endora's Fortune Telling Cards" were born.

Besides being so gifted, Christine is also a very generous person with her time, in my humble opinion. She has gone the extra mile in helping me to make my interviews with herself and Joseph go smoothly, and then some. I respect her talent, knowledge, and gracious nature, and know that we will be seeing a lot more from Christine Filipak.

I think it is because I have been reading tarot since a very young age, and the fact that I have numerous decks that call to me and force me through their sheer magical will to buy them, that I discovered Madame Endora's Fortune Telling Cards. Pick a deck up and you will see not only the detail and beauty of their artistry, but also the simplistic complexity of their use and meanings.

So, as all good gushings must come to an end... here is my interview with Christine Filipak of Monolith Graphics:

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Christine Filipak: I was originally intrigued by the art of the tarot more than the divinatory meanings of the cards. Once I became more interested in the mythology of the cards, I began to research the history of the tarot.

Madame Endora's Fortune Cards are different than traditional tarot decks. The imagery and meanings are based in folklore, ancient mythology and mysticism from several different cultures, taking wisdom from each of them.

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Christine Filipak: Madame Endora was a regular feature in Dark Realms, a magazine that Monolith Graphics published between 2000 and 2008. The articles covered a wide variety of divination methods, plus she provided insight into different myths, legends, folklore, and spiritual belief systems. The card deck was simply a way to combine all of these ideas into something useful and fun.



Madame Endora was inspired by the Witch of Endor, who was a spirit medium from Biblical lore. According to the legend, King Saul had driven out all the necromancers and magicians from his kingdom. But fearing an impending invasion from his enemies, he disguised himself and sought out a witch in the village of Endor in order to discover his fate. At the king's bequest, the witch called upon the spirit of the prophet Samuel, who predicted Saul's downfall. The tale does not end happily, but illustrates irony and the pitfalls of hypocrisy.

Madame Endora offers the wisdom of the ages. Her advice is sensible and inspiring, and her fortunes are a combination of inner reflection, common sense and a positive attitude.

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Christine Filipak: The deck contains a lot of symbolism and references to mythology from different cultures to convey various moral stories. To organize all these aspects, I assigned suits that are a bit different than what one finds in a traditional tarot. The Royal Court represents people of influence like the king and queen, maiden and minstrel. The Realm of Fable depicts figures from ancient lore such as fairies and satyrs. The Bestiary is a collection of creatures, both real and imaginary. The Treasury holds valuable mystical artifacts and talismans that can empower those who understand them. The Elements are symbolic representations of celestial bodies and the forces of nature.

Each card is inscribed with a brief meaning for simple interpretation. A more in-depth meaning of each card is provided in the accompanying booklet.

@]]fg@Uf. K \ Uhk Ug'mi f'dfcWgg]b h YXyj Ycda YbhcZh YXW3

Christine Filipak: Joseph Vargo and I worked together on this deck. We each illustrated different cards. I illustrated the feminine figures such as The Seer, The Queen and Hindrance, and some people will recognize Joseph's style in The Greenman, The Golem and The Satyr. I did many of the symbolic icons, Stars, Fire, Water, Air, etc., while Joseph did a lot of the creatures, Spider, Wolf, Wyvern and others. We worked on the various borders and backgrounds together. It was actually a 50/50 collaboration on the whole project. One example is The Siren, which was completely drawn by Joseph in pencil on white paper, then I came along and added all the color to her scales and fins and placed her on an abstract background that resembles a swirling sea. I did the Sun using computer illustration but incorporated a hand drawn scarab beetle that Joseph had created.

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Christine Filipak: The whole project took less than six months from conception to completion, although some of the imagery was rendered and painted before the project began. There was also an extensive amount of research and editing involved in creating the text for the accompanying booklet.

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Christine Filipak: For the female figures, I used watercolors, pastel pencils, and ink on watercolor paper. I originally painted The Seer, The Queen and Hindrance as slightly different figures and displayed the original paintings in an art gallery that I helped design and build with Joseph in 1997. Over time I decided to change the images a bit, so I scanned them into the computer and did some Photoshop magic, adding borders, darkening colors, and things like that.

Mostly, I prefer the computer as a tool for illustration. I might go back to traditional techniques to achieve something that just doesn't look natural on the computer (like textures and hair, or to get that genuine hand-drawn look). But I'll usually scan it and clean it up using Photoshop. Everything we print must go from canvas to computer at some point, just to make the printing plates.

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cZh Ylf kcf_ "=gh YFYUgdWVWVW`ci f'dUYHYmi ~_ Ylc kcf_ k]h `cf XcYg]hXYdYbXcb`
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Christine Filipak: I'm comfortable with any color or combination. It really just depends on what mood I'm trying to achieve. But I do tend to gravitate towards a "royal" palette: rich burgundy or blood red, dark purple, warm golden tones, vivid deep blues and dark greens. I imagine those colors woven into a lush tapestry that's hanging on a stone wall in some great gothic castle.

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Christine Filipak: I have a light side, and for this I love Art Nouveau. The style is highly decorative, flowing and sensual, and very feminine.

I also have a dark side. I love Gothic art and architecture — which by contrast is heavy, ornate, oppressive, gloomy, and even disturbing at times.

I really love and appreciate artwork of all types. I like primitive art, Renaissance art, fantasy art, iconic art, jewelry design, fashion design, sculpture, contemporary graphic design and photography if it's well thought out and executed.

My only personal rule is that a "work of art" must actually look like the subject, portraying that subject so the viewer can actually tell what it is without asking, even if it's a subject of fantasy. In graphic design or photography, the work or illustration must clearly and quickly communicate the concept or mood.

I do not consider something to be a "work of art" when it looks like someone poured paint into a blender and turned it on without the lid in place. It could be fun, but it doesn't involve talent, skill or much thought. The same goes for so-called "sculpture" that when "finished" looks like nothing more than a rock dragged out of a desert and mounted on a block of wood.

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Christine Filipak: Alphonse Mucha is my favorite artist of the Art Nouveau period (late 1800s to early 1900s), and his works have greatly influenced some of my own illustration for the Madame Endora cards.

Of course, there's Joseph Vargo. If not for him, I'd have probably never done this deck. He pushed me relentlessly. When it comes to my own artwork, I'm so weird. If I have to actually draw or paint something, I will procrastinate, mull over things, and forever make changes, but with my graphic design work, like when it involves putting together a layout, or overseeing the print-production of some new product of ours, I dig right in and never stop until the job's done.

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Christine Filipak: I don't have any plans to do another deck, but Madame Endora has recently been adapted for the Apple iPhone. The entire deck can be downloaded as an app from iTunes. Just search iTunes for "Madame Endora." The developer is also planning to make a version for Nokia and other phones. The same may be done in the future for The Gothic Tarot.

I personally can't wait and hope to see an app for my Blackberry. Make sure to visit Christine at the links below, and pick up her fortune telling cards. You won't regret it.



LINKS:

Monolith Graphics

www.monolithgraphics.com/fortune.html

Apple

<http://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewSoftware?id=313132313&mt=8>

Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/096757563X/>