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Strength

HENRY CRAWFORD ADAMS

I grew up in what is now known as Atlanta, Georgia, the traditional homelands of the Mvskoke (Muscogee) and Tsalaguwetiyi (Cherokee) peoples ... the “City in the Forest.” Ever since I was a child, I have found joy and sanctuary in the beings of woodlands, streams, swamps, and skies. Birds, specifically, have always been symbols of power to me ... their beauty, enormous importance to global ecosystem functionality, and interwoven connection to human communities have made them a fixture of my life as an ecologist and an artist. Researching avian conservation allows me to better understand the intricate and nuanced relationships between ecosystem, wildlife, and human health, and how I can become a better advocate for environmental justice and equity. Bringing avian ecologies into my artwork as they relate to my experiences and the experiences of my communities, helps me process my emotions, share myself with others, and better navigate the world. My three pieces in this publication were inspired by, of course, avian ecologies and the Major Arcana of Tarot. Since its creation in the 15th century, Tarot has been used for a variety of intents, including gameplay and divination, and I’ve found it to be a wonderful tool for both interpersonal connection and introspection. While I am working on illustrations for all twenty-one major arcana, I felt particularly drawn to the three you will see herein and thought they combine into what I hope to be an empowering reading for my beloved Queer community.

STRENGTH

In Tarot, Strength represents a radiation of power coupled with inner understanding and love. The right to live boldly as our authentic Queer selves is under constant scrutiny and attack, especially for our non-binary, Gender-non-conforming, and BIPOC siblings. When I experience or learn of acts against us, in the streets, in our places of gathering, in government buildings, I, like many others, am filled with a maelstrom of emotions. At the core of my whirlpool, is the desire to feel strength. Many species of birds enter defense postures when they are threatened or protecting something, be it a valuable resource or their family. Owls, such as this Eurasian eagle owl, have a particularly striking defense posture. When I learned of the Club Q tragedy in November 2022, I could not get the image of a bristling owl, swirling with rage, protectiveness, grief, and love, out of my head. I wondered how I might want to express those feelings. In rumination, I began to make connections between this inner owl and the Tarot card, Strength. I was drawn to the Tarot definition of “strength” because it leaves so much room for ambiguity and self-definition. Strength does not have to be defined by physical might alone. It can be expansive and leave room for anything that contributes to our unique power, be that our softness, our sadness, our rest, our laughter. To bring that expansiveness into my illustration, I included the luna moth and aster flowers. An homage to the “Silence = Death” inverted triangle, the moth, combined with their garland and feathery companion, provides a reminder that power—that strength—is self-defined, comprising so many gorgeous aspects of self, and is an ever-transforming and -transformative thing.

Henry Crawford Adams (They/He) is a wildlife ecologist, educator, and illustrator and currently serves as the wildlife management coordinator at the Lincoln Park Zoo’s Urban Wildlife Institute.



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On the cover of this issue

“Strength,” a Tarot illustration representing a radiation of power coupled with inner understanding and love. | [HENRY CRAWFORD ADAMS](#)