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On this day in 1878, Pamela Colman Smith was born. Although you may not have heard this artist's name, you will have almost definitely seen her work: among many other achievements, Smith illustrated the famous Waite-Smith tarot deck.



Smith's most famous illustrations in the tarot deck appear everywhere, and are synonymous with tarot. But there was much more to this artist, illustrator, writer and occultist than her tarot deck.

Early in her career, Smith illustrated works of WB Yeats, and travelled with the Lyceum theatre group. She also wrote and illustrated her own books, including books about Jamaican folklore.

While juggling all this, Smith also found the time to hold open houses for artists, and be active in the Suffrage Atelier, a collective of illustrators contributing work to further the cause of women's suffrage - this is an illustration she made for the cause.



In 1907, Smith became the first painter to exhibit at Alfred Stieglitz's Gallery 291, becoming the first painter to show at a gallery which had previously been devoted to photography. Her show was successful, and she showed twice more.

Smith had synaesthesia and painted music, such as Bach's Chromatic Fantasy and Beethoven's Symphony 5 in C minor.



Here's a few more of our favourite Pamela Colman Smith works:
Sonata No. 11 - Beethoven (1907, watercolour on paper board)



Sketch for Glass, 1908, Watercolour and ink on paper



Sea Creatures, undated, watercolour on paper



Little is known about Smith's personal life. She may have been gay - she never married, and she lived with a woman, Nora Lake, for 20 years, and one of her best friends, Edith Craig, was an out lesbian.

We also don't know with certainty about her race. She had a white father, but was often read as black or Japanese.

So, now you know her name. Pamela Colman Smith is the artist behind the famous tarot deck you see everywhere, and there was more to her than that.

The Vagina Museum is a charity. Times are tough for museums, and every gift you choose to make supports the world's first bricks and mortar museum dedicated to vaginas, vulvas and the gynaecological anatomy https://t.co/veQ7PIR9D3

