



By Susan Shie

The original idea struck me in 1998. I decided to start a major project: my own tarot card deck. The centuries-old deck of 56 minor cards in four suits and 22 face cards is used for fortune-telling these days,

Painters think I make quilts. Quilters think I make paintings. I call them “time capsules,” because they tell what was happening while I was making them.

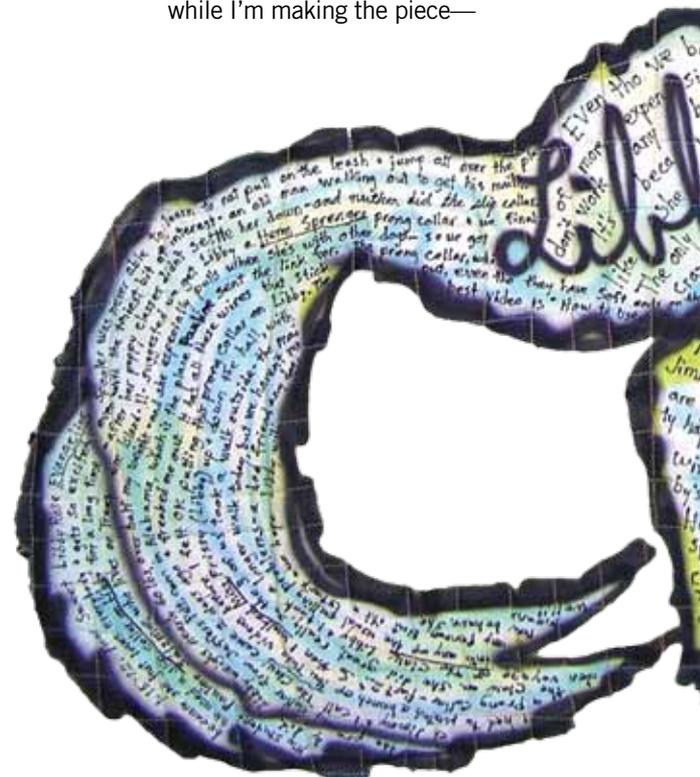
but it has also evolved into the playing cards of today. My deck focuses on the kitchen, because that’s the center of life, in my mind. It’s where the family meets, and where we nurture and communicate with each other. Every time I started one of the 22 major pieces, I had to figure out what kitchen object would “be” that card.

For the first quilt, I chose the colander, because we use it to wash and purify our food, to represent the innocence of the Fool, card #0. The titles of



the quilts in the series include both the tarot card name and my own card name, like “The Colander / Fool: Card #0 in the Kitchen Tarot.”

It might take the rest of my life to make an art quilt for each of the 78 cards in a tarot deck, but I decided to just start and be patient. My quilts are covered with words that tell what’s happening while I’m making the piece—



globally and at home. In the beginning, I'd embroider the words by hand and embellish them with tiny beads. Each piece seemed to be taking longer. I'd paint for a week or so, and then sew by hand for

months and months. By the time I was finished with a piece, the current events had become really old news.

Then two things happened. My fingertips went numb from hand sewing, and I got an air pen. I figured out how to write words with fabric paint and how to machine quilt a wonky grid that held my

interest. I loved being able to make a much larger piece much faster—in a month and a half or less, if I push—and include tons of stories. Now I think I can get the deck done by 2022. The whole project will have taken 24 years, and I will be 72 when it's done. I really hope I can do it.



# Time capsule quilts



To follow my train of thought as I created the first two Kitchen Tarot quilts of 2012, compare the timelines to the imagery you see on the quilts. The series is like a diary, recording the important news of the day as well as events in my own family that are important to me.

## Sweet Jane

On New Year's Day 2012, I shuffled a tarot deck and drew a minor card that would become this next piece. I planned to make this quilt about Steve Jobs, who had died just a few months before. The card was the Nine of Coins or Pentacles, which in my Kitchen Tarot project is the suit of Potholders. Nines represent fulfillment and integrating what we've learned. Coins signify wealth and well-being. This card stands for independence, self-sufficiency, and freedom. It's achievement in the world, based on one's maturing and working hard. It can mean wealth, but more importantly it means a strongly developed experiential and emotional maturity. I guess I may have reached a tad of that, at age 61, and Steve Jobs certainly could be represented by this card.

Sweet Jane is the name I gave my iPad. My granddaughter, Eva, and her cousin, Olivia, were staying with us between Christmas and New Year's and were drawing with me on Jane with the Art Studio app. Eva also made a large drawing of our dog, Libby, and that drawing became my inspiration for this piece. I drew us three drawing Libby on Sweet Jane, all at the same time, and made us floating over Libby, who was sprawling on the couch. Eva, Olivia, and I are mermaids, because we watched Eva's movie *The Mermaid Tale* and because I'd just



finished reading Sue Monk Kidd's book *The Mermaid Chair*. The girls also watched Olivia's movie *The Dolphin Tale*.

I'd read a really good new biography of Jobs by Walter Isaacson, watched the movie *Pirates of Silicon Valley*, and did a lot of online research. When I was air pen-writing on this painting, I massively consolidated his life into what would fit on his pants (I call it a pantleg biography) on his blue jeans. He has angel wings and is holding my 3Gs iPhone.



### SWEET JANE TIMELINE

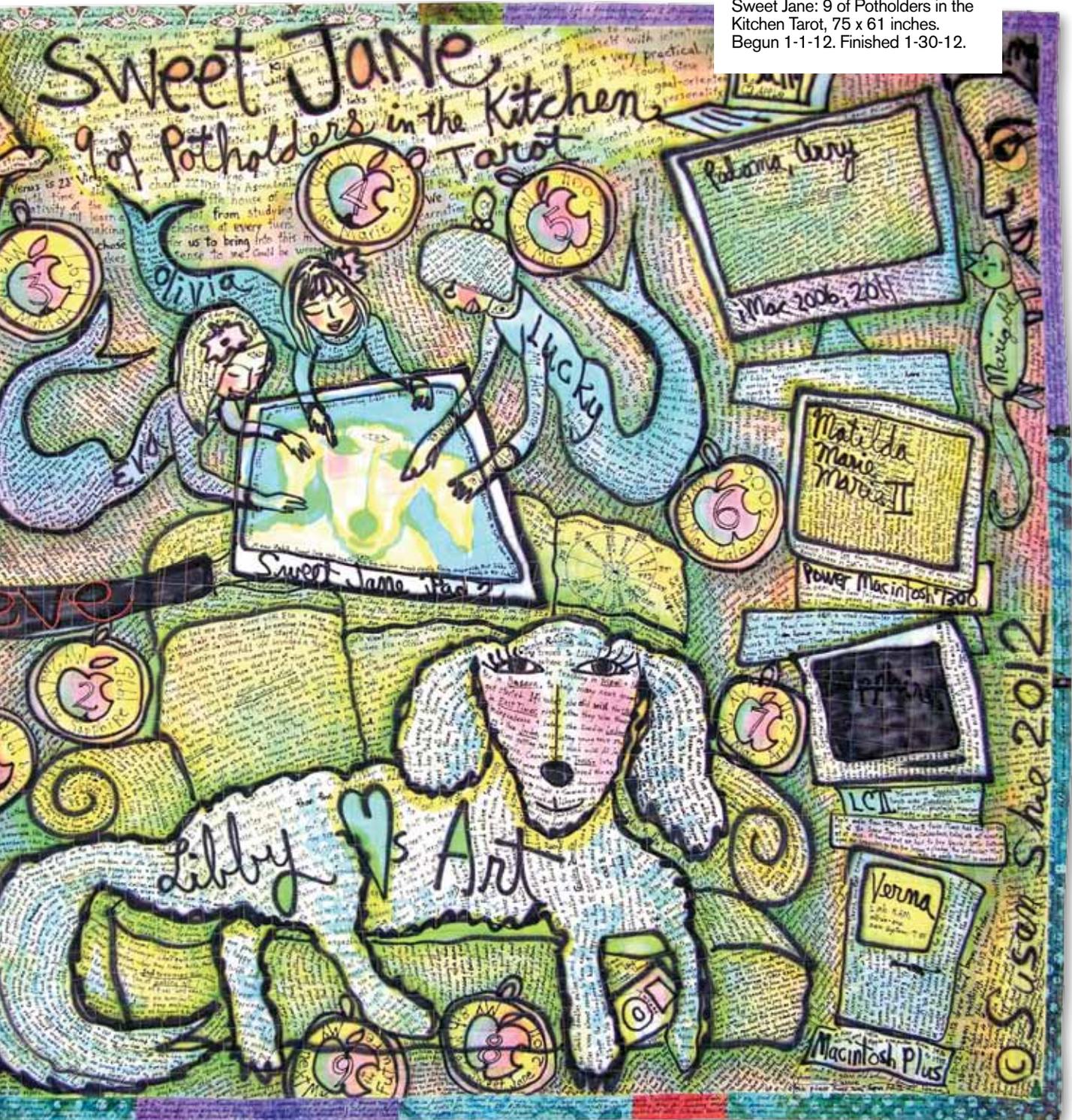
**Jan. 6** I listened to the episode of *This American Life* on NPR about the electronics factories in China that make parts for Apple products.

**Jan. 12** Second anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti

**Jan. 13** The cruise ship Costa Concordia sank in the Mediterranean Sea. The captain is on trial for abandoning his ship.

**Jan. 14** We gave Libby her first walk with her new collar.

Sweet Jane: 9 of Potholders in the Kitchen Tarot, 75 x 61 inches. Begun 1-1-12. Finished 1-30-12.



**Jan. 16 MLK Day** My daughter fell at the Pizza Skate and hurt her leg. The Obamas did service at a community center to honor Dr. King.

**Jan. 17** Michelle Obama's 48th birthday. My cousin Tamara had her first baby, Chloe Jasmine. We sent her a pair of deerskin baby booties.

**Jan. 18** Wikipedia shut down for 24 hours. President Obama denied the start of the Keystone XL Pipeline.

**Jan. 19** Libby and Jamie's dog, Carly, knocked me down at the schoolyard.

**Jan. 23** Chinese New Year of the Yin Water Dragon. Newt Gingrich won the South Carolina Republican primary. Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords resigned to recover from her gunshot wound.

## Flowers of the Arab Spring

On to the next piece. On Feb. 2, I pulled the Knight of Swords card—Paring Knives in my deck. The knight is a defender and a person of action. The suit of swords is air, thought, word, movement, and communication. I thought of Joan of Arc, a woman warrior, and decided my piece would have two strong women of words who are both involved in Arab Spring, the wave of democratic revolution in the Middle East and North Africa. I chose my friend Carolyn Robinson, a journalist who is in Libya on assignment. The other woman is Dalia Ziada, an Egyptian social justice worker, who is almost solely responsible for translating a very serious, historic, and educational 1958 comic book about Dr. Martin Luther King into Arabic, and making sure it got into everyone's hands, before and during the early protest days in Cairo. Dalia blogs about freedom for Egypt and the struggle for women's rights in the Arabic world. Well after I made up the name for this piece, I heard that Dalia had said, "Women are the flowers of the Arab Spring." Maybe I'd read that and forgotten. It seems too coincidental!

Dalia is holding up the MLK book, and Carolyn is leaning toward her, holding a microphone, with her laptop under her arm. I put a horse up in the sky above them (Libby was the model) and drew four palm trees with paring knives in their trunks. The four ancient Egyptian women at the bottom of the piece are lifted, freehand, from an image I found online of what turned out to be Hebrew women. I loved their printed, colorful dresses and big brown shoes! Ancient Hebrews wove wool into patterned cloth, very unlike the Egyptians' white cotton garments. They were strong, compelling women.



### FLOWERS OF THE ARAB SPRING TIMELINE

**Feb. 2-7** Egypt has detained Americans, planning to put them on trial for giving money to the rebels and breaking rules. China and Russia vetoed a UN Security Council sanction of the Syrian government for killing its people. The

Komen Foundation dumped aid to Planned Parenthood. Komen's Karen Handel (a Tea Party person) resigned. Gulf Arab states recall their envoys from Syria and send Syrian ambassadors home.

**Feb. 8** In California, Prop 8 (blocking the gay marriage law) was overturned.

**Feb. 11** Whitney Houston died.

**Feb. 13** Big snowstorm. Eva drew on my iPad. The governor of Washington signed same-sex marriage into law, making it the seventh state to have it.

**Feb. 16** Anthony Shadid, Lebanese-America reporter, died in Syria, but of an asthma attack, not what we thought.

