

# Artist Trading Cards

*Conceptually ATCs are about exchanging art without the interface of the art world and without money being involved.*

• [Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org)

## What are ATCs?

Artist Trading Cards (ATCs) are miniature works of art, usually done on card stock, that are traded between artists. They can be about anything and made with any media, materials, or techniques. They can be produced as one-of-a-kind originals, in limited editions, or in a series based on a particular theme or subject. It's all up to the individual artist. The rules for ATCs are simple.

### ATCs must:

- measure 2.5 x 3.5 inches (64 X 89 mm).
- be traded for other cards—not sold.
- be flat enough to fit into a plastic trading card sleeve.
- be signed and dated on the back of the card.

## A Short History of ATCs

Artist Trading Cards have been around for less than a decade. Yet, their historical roots can be traced back to the Mail Art and Fluxus movements of the 1960s, and even earlier to the Dadaist movement of the 1920s.

Swiss artist M. Vānci Stirnemann first developed the concept of Artist Trading Cards in 1996 while documenting his activities with other artists through 1,200 cards created by

hand. He exhibited these cards at his bookstore/gallery in Zurich in May 1997. On the last day of the exhibit, Stirnemann invited anyone who wanted a card to create their own ATCs to trade for his during the closing reception.

Following the ATC exhibition/trading session in Zurich, Stirnemann collaborated with Chuck Stake from Canada in 2000 to stage “The First International Biennial of Artist Trading Cards,” in Calgary that included cards created by 80 artists from 10 different countries. Since then, with the help of the Internet, interest in ATCs has spread around the globe.

Many artists who make ATCs use the Internet to display their cards and to locate others willing to trade cards by mail or to share ideas. However, organized face-to-face ATC sessions are, by far, the preferred means of meeting other artists and trading cards. Today, you'll find ATC swap sessions happening in most major cities around the world.

A recent search on Google, using the key phrase “Artist Trading Cards,” produced 187,000 hits.

## ATC Materials & Media

Artist Trading Cards can be made with all sorts of media, materials and techniques including markers, watercolors, acrylics, oil-pastels, colored pencils, inks, rubber stamps, linoleum blocks, sewing, pattern papers, old photographs, newspaper clippings, magazines, stickers, digital images, found items like tickets or stamps, and so on.

In addition to various types of drawing and painting tools, you'll want to have different types of adhesives available for collage work such as glue sticks, hot glue guns, gloss acrylic medium, gel medium, mod podge, or white glue.

Many ATC artists use photo-transfer methods to add images that have been photocopied or printed on an ink-jet or laser printer to their cards. Directions for doing photo transfers using clear packing tape, gel medium, or nail polish remover can be found in many craft magazines and on the Web.

ATCs are usually made on a card stock base, although they don't have to be. You can also use stiffened fabric, foamcore board, canvas, arches watercolor paper, discarded greeting cards, cereal box cardboard, and many other materials. Some artists use old playing cards that have been sanded with fine sandpaper and then covered with a thin coat of gesso for paint and collage materials to adhere to.

ATCs can be either two- or three-dimensional, but remember that the finished card must be thin enough to fit in a standard trading card sleeve.

## ATC Themes

ATC Swaps are sometimes organized around a theme or topic such as:

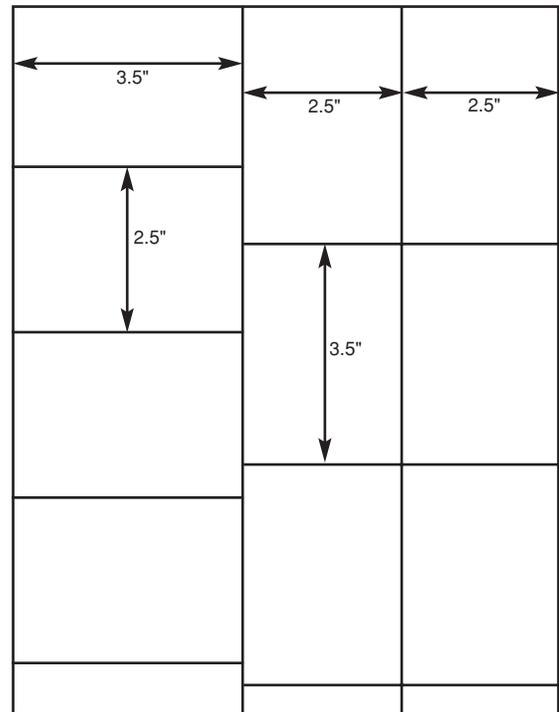
Altered faces	Holidays
Ancestors	Identity
Animals	Journeys
Bygone era	Letters of the alphabet
Where I live	Mythological creatures
Familiar phrases	Quotes
Family events	Song or poem excerpts
Heroes & heroines	Special places
Historical events	Windows & doorways

## ATC Starters

- Make a card that pays homage to an artist or musician you admire.
- Try a Round Robin ATC where one artist starts working on a card and then passes it on the next artist, and so on.
- Create a series of four cards that relate to a particular theme, art element or principle, or medium.
- Make a card based on a classified ad from the newspaper.
- Create a card that uses a written description of a person or place as source material.
- Create a card using images and words that give a sense of a particular time or place in history.
- Make a card that focuses attention on a particular social or ecological issue.

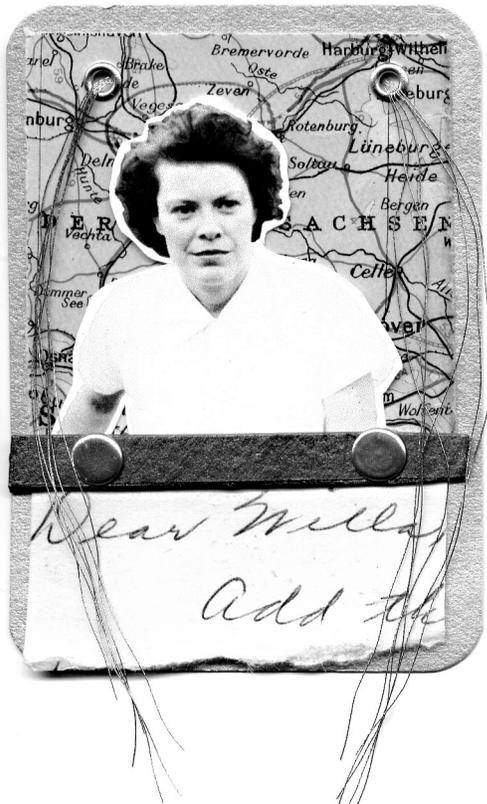
## ATC Tips

- When creating a card, follow the “Rule of Three” by including a background, focal image, and an embellishment.
- When working on collage, arrange the main shapes on your card before adhering them to the surface. Apply an adhesive to the back of your shapes and position them on the card. Lay a sheet of scrap paper over the surface and use a brayer or your fingertips to make sure that good contact has been made over the entire surface and that air bubbles are removed. Any excessive adhesive will stick to the scrap paper when it is removed.
- Tone the edges of cut or torn shapes with a soft-leaded pencil to help them blend into the background.



How to get ten cards from one sheet of 8.5" x 11" cardstock.

"Dear Willa" by Craig Roland, 2006.



## Trading ATCs

Trading cards is essential to the ATC idea. If you don't want to trade cards, you should not make ATCs.

Trading sessions are typically informal gatherings, with refreshments served. Participants may bring a few cards to trade, or many. A trading session (ts) often starts with someone asking “Did you bring cards to trade?” That leads to conversation between participants while cards are passed back and forth until a deal is struck.

While ATCs are usually traded one for one, some cards may be worth more. You can also “trade forward,” which means trading a card you received in an earlier session. In all, ATC trading sessions are intended to be enjoyable, educational, and supportive. From beginners to experienced traders, everyone is welcome!

# ATC Resources

## Books

**Artist Trading Cards, An Anthology of ATCs.** A Somerset Studio Publication, Laguna Beach, CA: Stampington & Co. 2004. ISBN 0-9717296-4-6.

**The Complete Guide to Altered Imagery** by Karen Michel. Gloucester, MA: Quarry Books. 2005. ISBN 1-59253-177-6.

**Trading Cards Techniques & ATCs** by Lisa Vollrath, Michele Charles, and Jim Holtz. Fort Worth, TX: Design Originals. 2005. ISBN 1-57421-259-1.

## Websites

**art-e-zine's Artist Trading Cards page**

[www.art-e-zine.co.uk/atc.html](http://www.art-e-zine.co.uk/atc.html)

Galleries of ATCs from past swaps organized by art-e-zine.

**Art in Your Pocket: ATCs**

[www.cedarseed.com/air/atc.html](http://www.cedarseed.com/air/atc.html)

Joumana Medlej's excellent primer on ATCs that offers lots of techniques and ideas to try on your own.

**Artist Trading Cards--A Collaborative Cultural Performance**

[www.artist-trading-cards.ch](http://www.artist-trading-cards.ch)

The original home of ATCs in Switzerland with archives, online galleries, history of the art form, links, and more.

**Artist Trading Cards' Journal**

[community.livejournal.com/artist\\_cards](http://community.livejournal.com/artist_cards)

Live Journal's online community for ATC enthusiasts.

**Artist Trading Cards Meetup**

[artisttradingcards.meetup.com](http://artisttradingcards.meetup.com)

Type in your zipcode number and find an ATC group near you.

**Artist Trading Cards--Union City Arts Education (PA)**

[www.ucarts.com/atc.htm](http://www.ucarts.com/atc.htm)

Art teacher Mary Elizabeth Meier manages this site that features several school-sponsored ATC events involving students, families and teachers; galleries of ATCs, and links to ATC resources.

**ATC Page at the New Gallery**

[www.thenewgallery.org/atcmedia.html](http://www.thenewgallery.org/atcmedia.html)

The original Calgary site of the The First International Biennial of Artist Trading Cards.

**Classroom Dada** by David Hoppe (2003)

[www.nuvo.net/archive/2003/02/26/classroom\\_dada.html](http://www.nuvo.net/archive/2003/02/26/classroom_dada.html)

Read how John Essex, an Indiana art teacher, uses ATCs to teach and motivate young women and girls at the Indianapolis Juvenile Correctional Facility.

**Ed's Trading Cards**

[www.geocities.com/edsatc/cards.html](http://www.geocities.com/edsatc/cards.html)

A brief introduction to ATCs, a sampling of ATCs by Ed Beal, and links to related sites.

**European Papers**

[europeanpapers.com](http://europeanpapers.com)

A great source for ATC supplies, like the ATC Wizard tool. Also, home of the House of Cards exhibition that features ATCs by 500 artists from all over the world.

**HiNgE**

[atc.hingeonline.com](http://atc.hingeonline.com)

This is a Philadelphia-based organization that stages regular ATC sessions.

**Yahoo! Artist Trading Cards Group**

[groups.yahoo.com/group/ArtTradingCards](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ArtTradingCards)

An e-mail group devoted to discussing and exchanging ATCs.

**Wikipedia's Artist Trading Cards Page**

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artist\\_trading\\_cards](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artist_trading_cards)

A description of ATCs with links to related sites.



"Dada 2" by Craig Roland, 2006.