

How to make and trade artist trading cards

Join in the fun of this worldwide phenomenon

Baseball, Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh cards are not the only ones worth trading. As paper crafters, we are constantly making scrapbooks and cards as gifts. Wouldn't it be cool to get something handcrafted in return? Welcome to the world of artist trading cards.

An artist trading card (ATC) is an original creation in the strict size of 2-1/2 by 3-1/2 inches. ATCs are mini art projects for art's sake intended to be swapped with other artists' cards. Artwork is vertical or horizontal and composed on one side so that the title, artist's name—that's you—and other contact information are on the back. Do not be intimidated by that word "artist"; talent and experience are subjective and never judged. The important part is originality.

M. Vänçi Stirnemann started the movement in 1996 when he exhibited 1200 original, personal cards in his Switzerland gallery. Attendees were invited to trade a card they made for one of his. Artist Chuck Stake took

the concept back to Canada. After he hosted the first international swap, ATCs became a global phenomenon.

Making your own ATCs

The foundation of your personal Picasso is a sturdy base. You can make that from your own cardstock, chipboard or fabric. Precut ATC blanks come in watercolor paper, canvas, scratchboard, Zentangle paper, plastic and more. After that, anything goes.

As scrapbookers, we already have plenty of supplies on hand: acrylic paint, ink, paper scraps, markers, extra photos, index prints, embossing powder, thread, rubber stamps and ribbon. ATCs are often designed flat to fit into protective baseball card plastic sleeves, but that does not limit you. I used a flat brad to hide a surprise under a swinging door. I received a fold-out comic book from a Pennsylvania artist and a stitched paper purse from Massachusetts.



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General supplies

- 3-1/2 by 2-1/2 inch card bases
- Individual card sleeves
- Strong adhesive, such as Mod Podge
- Gel medium
- Brushes and drawing tools
- Acrylic and watercolor paints
- Rubber stamps and chalk ink
- Alcohol inks
- Crayons, colored pens and pencils
- Die-cuts, punches
- Glimmer spray
- Wax paper

Other fun techniques to try

- Sheet music
- Foreign text pages, illustrated books
- Everyday ephemera: Chinese fortunes, banana stickers
- Patterned paper
- Used greeting cards
- Rubber stamped images
- Transfers
- Stenciling
- Embossing
- Direct to paper inking
- Melted crayon background



This ATC is a collage layered with scrapbook paper and border punched scraps.



Bits of everyday life can become embellishments or interactive elements in a pocket.

Because "acid free" and "archival safe" are not as relevant here, the world of ATCs introduces exciting techniques you may not have thought to try. Melting beeswax gives a misty coating to surfaces and also serves as a glue for collage. Transferring photocopied images onto other paper using acetone produces a vintage look. Rediscover shrink plastic. Hand coloring or altering photographs with alcohol ink gives a new look to your pictures. Brush brewed instant coffee and black tea onto cardstock bases to create an aged look. Don't forget fabric techniques such as embroidery, felting, cross-stitch and quilting. Once you gather your materials, let your inner child run wild. Pick a topic and dive right in.

Themes are limitless and can be specific or broad. Consider your interests, hobbies, TV shows and current media trends. Create cards based on your favorite quotes, the color red, dolphins, cats, holidays, owls, Winnie the Pooh, alphabets...anything you can imagine.

When everything is done, do not hide your treasures. I display my traded cards, and my personal ones I cannot bear to part with, in decorative tabletop boxes where I can flip through them. ATCs fit perfectly into 9-pocket card collecting sheets and store in a 3-ring binder. You can showcase your favorites in frames made with ATC-sized panels or on



Pull out pencils and markers to capture your latest pop-culture obsession like Angry Birds.



The small size of Zentangle designs is a perfect match for ATCs.

clip-on spinning towers.

Here are some final tips. Remember, ATCs are to be traded. Think small scale—a postage stamp accents while a business card overwhelms. A set of identical-looking ATCs is called an edition and are numbered. Individual ATCs that are based on one theme are called a series. An offshoot of trading cards is ACEO (Art Cards, Editions and Originals) and these cards are sold.

The real purpose behind this smallish art is personal interaction, and that's why joining a group of like-minded artists is important. This is a worldwide passion, so it is no surprise that there are online trading sites and Flickr groups. Your local scrapbook store may offer classes or host trading events. You can start your own group. This craft can be kid-friendly and offers a welcoming atmosphere for playing with art toys. Whatever your skill level, you will find encouraging attitudes. Collect art from everywhere and experience the simple joy of art!

By the way, some of the cards shown here are for trade!

Diana Hirsch is a Certified Zentangle Teacher and an award-winning writer. To inquire about classes or writing availability, she can be reached at diwolf@aol.com or through her blog at www.wolfhowlings.wordpress.com.

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