

# Art in Hand: Artist Trading Cards

GRADES: ALL

## BASED ON

Cincinnati Art Club  
*Tambola*, 1897  
Oil on wood panel  
Lent by the Poland / Verkamp Family, L1.2003

## OBJECTIVES

Artist Trading Cards have unlimited classroom applications to any subject, technique or concept. Depending on theme, cards can be used to reinforce or review, for example, the elements & principles of art, art history styles and facts, science concepts, vocabulary words, important figures/events in any field, or aesthetic stances (realism, abstraction, etc.).

- Students will create their own Artist Trading cards.
- Students will craft a well-made card of the correct size that will withstand handling.
- Students will apply knowledge of design concepts to create a "trade-worthy" card.

## CONCEPT

The idea of Artist Trading Cards (ATCs) is a recent development but has historical origins in Impressionism, early advertising, and art associated with the *Dada* and *Fluxus* movements.

Impressionist artists made small examples of their work to trade with other artists so that they could learn from each other, or to be used as business cards. Early cigarette producers included "trading cards" in their packaging, which consumers collected and traded for a full set. This influenced the production of other kinds of trading cards, including baseball cards.

In 1996, a Swiss artist, M. Vanci Stirnemann, noticed the excitement of participants at a hockey-card trading meet, and decided to recreate a similar social interchange among artists. Artist Trading Cards were born. One of the stipulations, however, was that ATCs could not be sold; they had to be traded. This kept the artwork out of the realm of commercialism, a concept shared with Mail Art, a movement begun by artists such as Ray Johnson in the 1950's. Mail Art is traded via the postal service and emphasizes personal exchanges among individuals. It rejects an exclusive status of art and places it in the realm of the "every person", values influenced by artists in the Dada (circa 1916-1920) and Fluxus (begun circa 1962) movements.

Today, ATCs are traded via "meetups", through the mail, or among individuals. The only restriction on ATCs is the size: 2.5" x 3.5". Otherwise, any and all media and imagery are acceptable. Some artists sell their ATCs on Ebay as ACEOs (Art Card Editions and Originals), but this practice is not highly regarded by true ATC aficionados. See the resource section for websites devote to this growing art form.

## ABOUT THE ART

Members of the Cincinnati Art Club created this panel showcasing the work of each member. The piece was passed from person to person until complete. It was used as a raffle item to raise money for the organization, a

place for artists to socialize and exchange ideas.

The social aspect of the Cincinnati Art Club, as well as the miniature paintings of the *Tambola*, share qualities with the contemporary practice of Artist Trading Cards, which will be explored in this studio workshop.

## **MATERIALS/PROCEDURE**

Heavy paper or mat board

Collage materials: paper scraps, glue/glue sticks, scissors, magazines

Other media: paint, gel pens, colored pencils

Rubber stamps, stickers and other flat embellishments

1. Introduce Artist Trading Cards as an art form in which everyone can participate, as a way to collect art and meet new people. Show examples from printed sources, the Internet, or make your own.
2. Pre-cut Artist Trading Cards to correct size or have students measure and cut their own. ATC must be 2.5" x 3.5". Any support materials can be used. Heavy paper is most commonly used. Mat board makes great ATCs and most frame shops will be happy to give you their leftovers. See accompanying template for cutting cards.
3. Decide on a theme or subject for your cards. Some examples include: the weather; dreams; heroes; design elements/principles; art styles; images based on poems, stories, words or songs; current or historical events, etc.
4. Students create cards. Any media can be used for ATCs. Collage is popular, but various techniques such as printmaking, colored pencil drawing or acrylic painting can be taught in the ATC format. If the medium tends to smear, such as pencil or oil pastel, the card should be protected with a few coats of clear acrylic spray (use with good ventilation only). It is possible to use a brush-on clear medium but this may cause streaking. Make sure collage pieces are very securely glued before spraying or coating to avoid buckling of the paper. Cards must be able to withstand a lot of handling so craft is important.
5. Make envelopes for ATCs if desired. (See accompanying template) Clear plastic trading card sleeves are also handy for storing an ATC collection.
6. Students can trade their cards with another classroom at their own or some other school in the U.S or even in another country. Suggestions for mailing ATCs are in the resource section below. In the true spirit of ATCs, the social aspect is integral to the process, so if a mail trade is done, encourage writing along with trading.

**Fun Idea:** One art teacher, Mary Elizabeth Meier, holds family ATC nights at her school and the whole community gets involved! See Ms. Meier's website in the resource section below.

## **ASSESSMENT**

1. How successful is the ATC in terms of its adherence to assigned theme?
2. How well is the ATC made in terms of craft? Criteria for the student-made ATCs:
  - a. Correct size (2.5" x 3.5")
  - b. Proper adhesion of materials to surface of card (no glue drips, loose edges or buckling)

3. How successful is the ATC in terms of its use of formal elements to create an attractive card? In order to be "trade-worthy", cards should have universal appeal; no personal names, initials, or other specific references unless dictated by the theme.

## **RESOURCES**

The original ATC site with history and lots of links:

<http://www.artist-trading-cards.ch/>

Art in Your Pocket-ATCs:

A comprehensive site on Artist Trading Cards:

<http://www.cedarseed.com/air/atc.html>

Art Teacher Mary Elizabeth Meier's site on ATC activities at her school:

<http://www.ucarts.com/atc.htm>

10 Tips for Hosting an Artist Trading Card Exchange:

[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/92536/10\\_mail\\_art\\_tips\\_on\\_hosting\\_an\\_artist.html](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/92536/10_mail_art_tips_on_hosting_an_artist.html)

Great website with templates for all kinds of boxes and envelopes:

<http://www.ruthannzaroff.com/mirkwooddesigns/templates.htm>

Wikipedia site on ATCs with interesting links:

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

Cryptic Creativity Projects on Artist Trading Cards: links to trading opportunities and other info:

<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~cjatkins/cryptic/atc.html>

## **Books**

Somerset Studio. *Artist Trading Cards: An Anthology of ATCs*. Laguna Hills, CA: Stampington & Co., 2004.

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS:**

### **VISUAL ARTS**

1. Understands and applies media, techniques and processes related to the visual arts
2. Knows how to use the structures (e.g., sensory qualities, organizational principles, expressive features) and functions of art
3. Knows a range of subject matter, symbols and potential ideas in the visual arts
5. Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others
6. Makes connections between visual arts and other disciplines