

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARTIST TRADING CARDS

In the beginning ...

In 1996, M. Vänçi Stirnemann, a Swiss artist, began making small artworks the size of commercial trading cards. An exhibition of 1200 of his cards ran at his second-hand bookshop and gallery, INK.art&text, in Zurich, between April 23 and May 31, 1997.



Vänçi Stirnemann

The exhibition ended with a trading session. The **Artist Trading Card (ATC)** project was intended to allow people from different backgrounds and abilities to participate in an ongoing art project, which was not part of the established art market.

Artist Trading Cards are 2.5" x 3.5" (or 64 x 89 mm) miniature works of art created for the sole purpose to be traded in person with other artists. ATCs are the same size as sport or hobby trading cards, so artists often use the same clear pocket pages to store their finished cards and collections.

Each Artist Trading Card (ATC) is an original 'small edition' work of art, and most importantly: self-produced by the artist. ATCs can be created singly, or in a series, but should be signed, titled and dated on the back, like the lovely little works of art they are.

Although most people start by using thicker papers or cardstock, ATCs can be made by anybody of any age or ability, using whatever material they choose, which results in ATCs that are as individual and unique as the people who make them.

ATCs are made to be traded one-for-one with other artists who are also making their own cards for trade, and are generally traded in person at "Trading Sessions" or whenever and wherever ATC card traders meet and agree to trade. They can also be traded by mail, or by sending pages of ATCs to exhibitions which include trading as part of the

exhibit, or ATC group swaps organized online, but the original goal of their creator, Vänçi Stirnemann, was for them to be traded one-for-one, in person, between artists.

Selling or buying ATCs clearly contradicts the initial idea. Instead, people would meet at trading sessions and exchange their art work in a democratic face to face situation. Anybody can participate in the project and all techniques are allowed. ATCs are produced in various media, including dry media (pencils, pens, markers, etc.), wet media (watercolour, acrylic paints, etc.), paper media (in the form of collage, papercuts, found objects, etc.), or even metals, fibre, wax and other materials.



Don Mabie
(AKA Chuck Stake)

ATC's come to Canada ...

A few weeks after the first ATC exhibition and trading session in Zurich, the Canadian artist Don Mabie (AKA Chuck Stake) adopted the idea and showed artist trading cards at the Alberta Collage of Art and Design in Calgary, Alberta. In

September 1997, a trading session was organized at the New Gallery in Calgary.

Even though Artist Trading Cards have only formally been around since 1997, their historical roots can be traced back to the Dadaist and Mail Art movement of the 1920s. Mail Art is a worldwide cultural movement that began in the early 1960s and involves sending visual art (but also music, sound art, poetry, etc.) through the mail.

Today, making and trading ATCs has spread worldwide and there are regular trading sessions in many cities around the world, including those organized by Vänçi's, which continue on a monthly basis in Zurich, and here in Vancouver.

Artist Trading Cards in Vancouver ...

The Vancouver Artist Trading card group was formed in late 2000 by Bill Thomson, Lois Klassen and Ginger Mason. They wanted to meet regularly with other working artists to socialize, share their art experiences and collaborate on projects.

I heard about the group just a few months later from someone who shared a table at an art workshop at The Glass Onion. I knew instantly it was what I'd been looking - I was new to Vancouver and wanting to connect to creative people. Because ATCs are small and can be made using any material you have on hand, I knew they'd be portable and affordable, which is useful when starting out on a new art path.

My first meeting with the Vancouver ATC group was in February 2001, and I threw myself deep into art - making and trading with a group of interesting, working artists. The conversations fascinated me: materials, methods, venues and grant proposals were common discussion topics.

I wasn't a "working artist". I was making art for the joy of it. Because it made me happy to make things - and always has. I loved the conversation and the sharing and learning from each other, but I had no firm goal in mind about becoming a working artist.

As time passed, and the idea of Artist Trading Cards spread farther and farther into the non-working-artist world, and as the three group founders moved on to larger (and differently located) art practices, I eventually became the organizer of the group.

It was important to me that the group continued - I wanted to keep on meeting regularly with creative people and talk about intriguing ideas and learn new art skills. I started to more actively recruit other artists and art friends into the group.

For many years our group met every month at The Grind Coffee Shop (now Aperture) at Main St and King Edward, but as laptops computers became more popular and more people were studying and working in coffee shops, it became obvious we needed to find somewhere to meet where art trading, and perhaps

even art-making, and not coffee, could be the focus.

Thanks to a connection with Dawn Livera, we landed at MOSAIC, first in their Van East location just off Commercial Drive, and now at their Boundary Road location, for our meetings. In our new location, with a large room and lots of tables, we were able to stretch our meetings to 4 hours.

So, on the third Sunday of each month, from noon till 3 pm, people arrive in their own time, to casually work on small, portable art projects they've brought with them. We spend this time socializing, inspiring each other, sharing skills and poking around on the "sharing table" which is full of craft materials we're ready to pass on to each other. At 3 pm, we tidy up our art projects and the "official" ATC (Artist Trading Card) card trading begins. We usually do this by passing our binders around in a circle so everyone gets to see what everyone else has created and taking a card from each binder as it passes, knowing everyone else will be taking a card from our binder at the same time.

As the organizer, I also create a calendar/prompt list each year, based on suggestions from within the group. Sadly, the current virus situation has put an end to our meetings (first time ever!), but for interest's sake, here's our calendar/prompt schedule for 2020:

Vancouver Artist Trading Card Group 2020 Dates & Prompts			
January	19	🟢	Trading ~ Time ~ Ties That Bind
February	16	🟡	Continents ~ Computers ~ Cruise
March	15	🟠	Lucky ~ Lessons ~ Luxury
April	19	🟡	Magic Carpet ~ Measure ~ Museum
May	17	🟠	Baubles ~ Bread ~ Buddha
June	21	🟡	Sewing ~ Swamps ~ State of Mind
July	19	🟢	Emerald ~ Elegance ~ Edges
August	16	🟢	Castles ~ Clouds ~ Change
September	20	🟢	Paper Cuts ~ Pearls ~ Purpose
October	18	🟢	Ghosts ~ Giraffe ~ Groovy
November	15	🟢	Money ~ Monsters ~ Moons
December	20	🟢	Words ~ Wisdom ~ Wonder

A Peek at
My Own ATC
Collection

As you can imagine, I've been trading ATCs since 2001, so I have thousands of ATCs in my collection.

I'm still working on how to catalogue / sort / display them. It would drive a librarian crazy, I think. Do you file them by method, material, artist, colour or date?

Here are a few from my collection that I love, for various reasons ...

From top to bottom,
left to right ...

Forest Diary

A random find of a countertop sample at a hardware store led to a multi-page tagbook (see page 5 for inside view)

Colour Longs to be Free

Wax crayon rubbing of
a rubber stamp on thin
paper, then painted
with watercolour and
overstamped with
another rubber stamp.

Universal Mysteries

Hand-typed on cheese-cloth, then glued to dark blue cardstock.

Poetsoul & Sailor

Black and white text
document created on
computer in Word, then
selected pages from an
En Route magazine fed
through the bypass
tray on the printer.

Then over stamped with
blue and gold with
compass and stars.



A Peek at My Own ATC Collection

I feel it's important to be alert to everything I see, hear and read and to be prepared to do something unexpected with the materials that come into my hands. I struggle regularly with throwing even tiny things away because everything has the potential to tell a story in art.

ATCs, from top to bottom, left to right ...

Light Being Inspired by the drawings of Brian Andreas in his book "Traveling Light". Hand-drawn on water-colour paper, then painted.

Mystic Hand Found paper, sanded over textured surface + rubber stamp and added text.

Attachment Wax crayon rubber on dollar store lettering stencil + watercolour painting + found paper and buttons stitched on. I prefer to actually stitch where possible to be "true" to the materials.

**She's Someone's Sister
Mother Daughter Wife**

Created during an event in celebration of Women becoming Persons. Found papers, rubber stamp, text.

When Worlds Collide

Two visions of the world representing the arrival of colonial culture on the West Coast. Rubber stamps, dragged ink pads on paper.

1970s Sofa

Even the tiniest bits of yarn can be reclaimed and woven on cardstock to evoke your itchiest childhood memories.

Stella Starcatcher

What happens when two stamps get too close together on my table.

**Meanwhile, Back
at Pandora's Flat ...**

Box is open, door is ajar, trouble is afoot ... uh oh. Scrap papers + drawing.

I Love My Yellow Raincoat

Yellow paint squished between sheets of acetate, with added buttons.



A Peek at My Own ATC Collection

One of my favourite things to do is PLAY. And there seems to be some part of me that longs to tell a story, even a very short story, using these few materials, in a visual way.

I've learned over the years to follow my instincts when it comes to combining things. These are, after all, small pieces of art that should satisfy me first ...

The ATCs, from top to bottom, left to right ...

Cut!

Piece of film tucked through cut on cardstock, with two rubber stamps: large hand + small scissors.

Red Flag

Family photo, trimmed to size, with story added.

Astronomer

Found text + blue sky in magazine ad, stars were punched by hand, joined by gold pen lines and hand-written sticker.

Poem for Joyce Kilmer

Twisted brown lunchbag + rubbing with stamp pad + stitching onto card and hand-written text.

Thinking Cap Series

Rubber stamps on folded card + opens to stickers and drawings (see page 6).

Hidden Wood Moth

Found bark patterned paper, imprinted and folded (see page 6)

Moon Over Khufu

Found magazine sky + moon rubber stamp + sandpaper with added ink for 3D. I love tactile materials.

Wire Frame Letters

Pierced cardstock, with beads added using copper wire. Tactile fun - the beads slide on the wires.

Child's Play

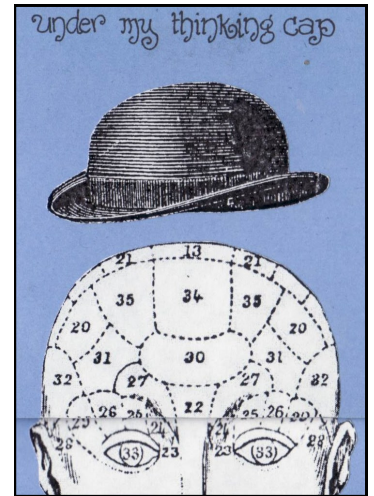
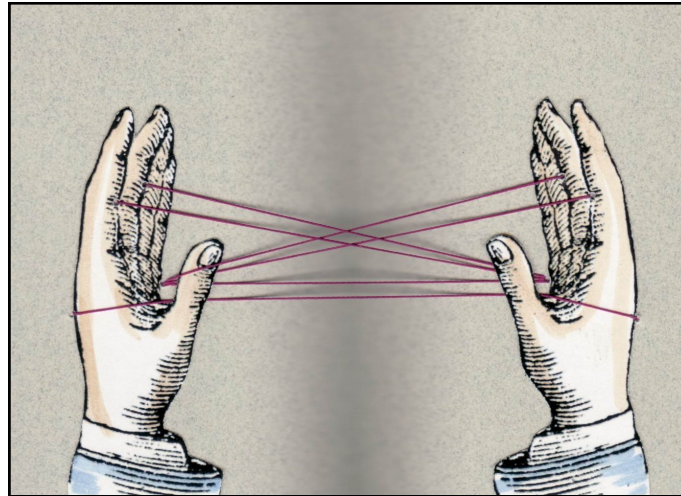
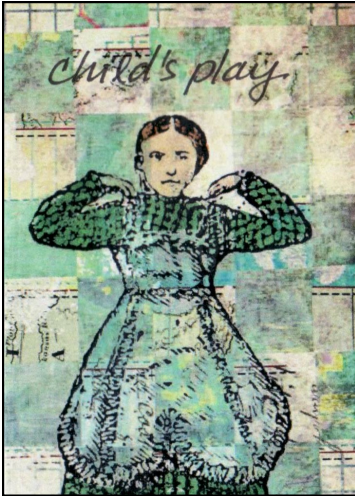
Rubber stamp + written text + paint. Opens to show hands doing Cat's Cradle with thread (see page 6).



A Peek at
My Own ATC
Collection

My urge to tell stories, sometimes means I have to go beyond the limited size of Artist Trading Cards. I like things that are deeper and richer than they first appear. One of my guiding "observances" in my life is this:

"Anything examined very closely will give up its mystery,
but in return, reveal its wonders."



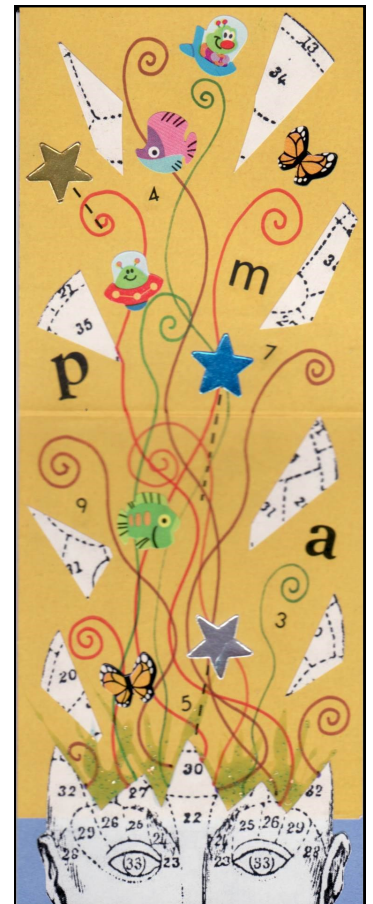
Child's Play opens so moving hands can pull tight loose threads into Cat's Cradle.

Under My Thinking Cap
opens to reveal an
explosive brain full of
imaginings ...



Hidden Wood Moth opens in three folds to
reveal a much larger linocut of a moth I
made for Hilary Lorenz's Moth Migration
Project

<http://mothmigrationproject.net/>



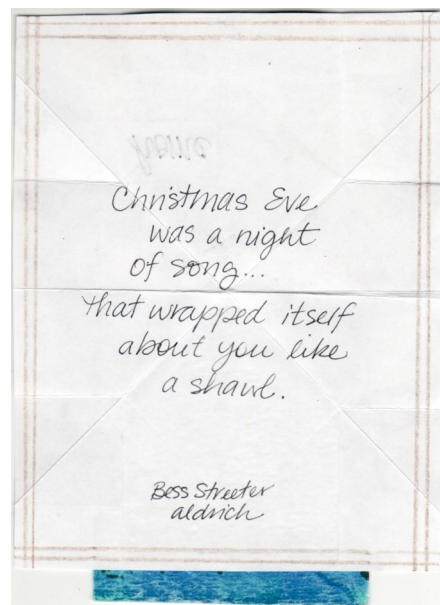
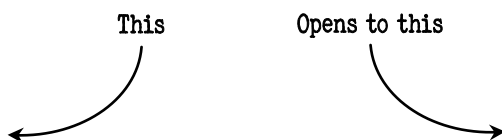


Home for Christmas (folding house)

This ATC was made spontaneously at an event hosted by Mary Peterson Bennett at Hastings Mill Museum.

As usual I wanted to add a little something to the card so it opened to reveal more, and I thought of this ingenious paper fold.

For instructions to do the "folding house", see the last page.



RULES for Artist Trading Cards:

Max. size: 2.5" x 3.5" (64 x 89 mm)

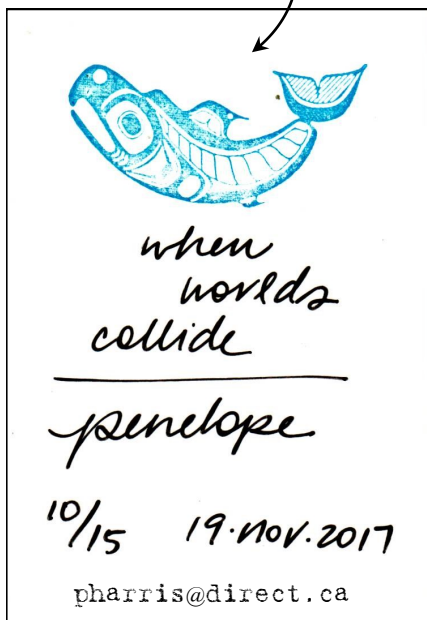
Materials: Any and all that you're comfortable using

Made to be TRADED not SOLD

Don't forget the back!

Make sure you include your name, your contact info, the date you made it if it's part of a series.

(This is the back of an ATC I showed on page 4)



Online Resources about Artist Trading Cards

History and links to learn more at the Lines and Colors blog:

<http://linesandcolors.com/2006/08/17/artist-trading-cards/>

or Google: "Lines and Colors Artist Trading Cards"

Making fabric Artist Trading Cards by Julie Fei-Fan Balzer

https://balzerdesigns.typepad.com/balzer_designs/2011/05/colorful-garbage-atcs.html

ATCs For All - Galleries to look at and organized mail swaps. Free to join.

<http://www.atcsforall.com/>

Altered art has several articles about ATCs:

History: <http://www.altered-art.net/artist-trading-cards.html>

How to: <http://www.altered-art.net/make-artist-trading-cards.html>

Statement by Don Mabie (Chuck Stake) on the history of ATCs

<http://www.artisttradingcards.org/>

YMC - Motherhood Unfiltered talks about making ATCs with kids

<https://www.yummymummyclub.ca/blogs/andrea-mulder-slater-the-art-of-childhood/20150919/artist-trading-cards-for-kids>

or Google: "yummy mummy artist trading cards"

More Questions? Feel free to ask me ... Penelope Harris pharris@direct.ca

FOLD - A - HOUSE

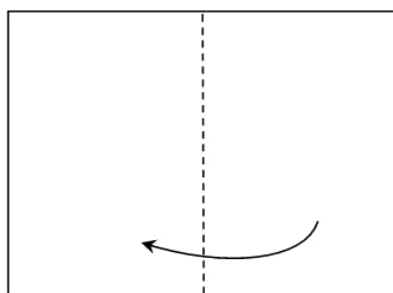
Step by Step
Fast & Easy

By: Penelope

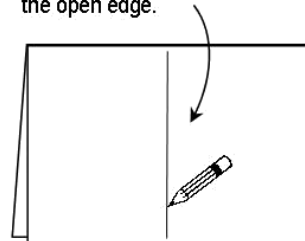
Start with a rectangular piece of paper.



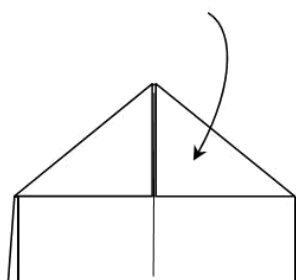
Fold it in half.



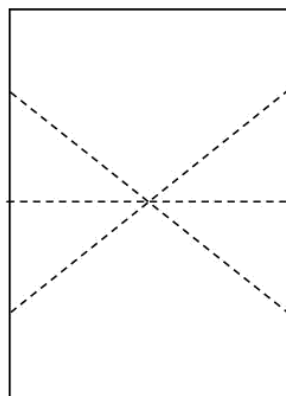
Using a pencil and ruler, draw a faint line down the exact center of your folded paper, from the fold to the open edge.



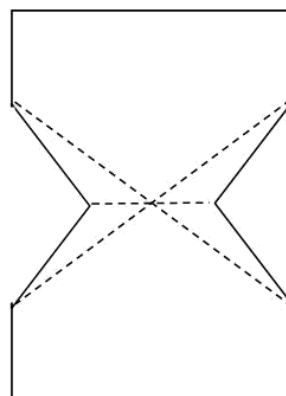
Fold both corners of the folded edge of the paper toward the pencil line, making a house shape.



Unfold your paper.
It should look like this:

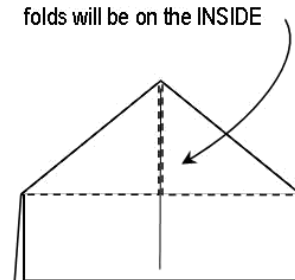


Tuck both sides into the middle

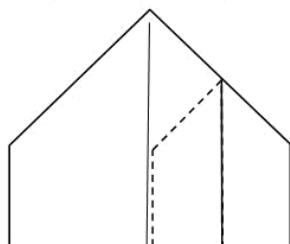
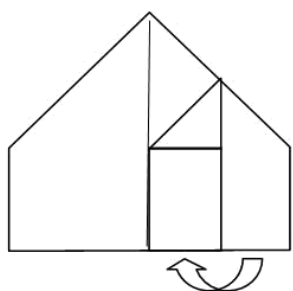


Fold the paper in half into a house shape again.

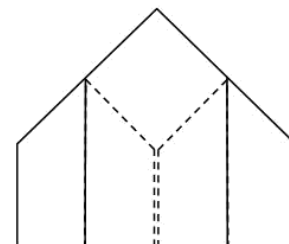
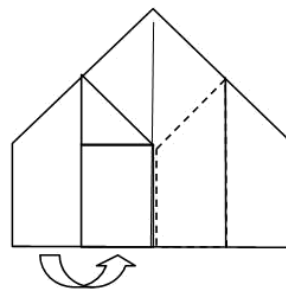
This time with the corner folds will be on the INSIDE



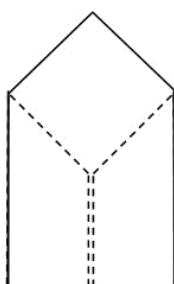
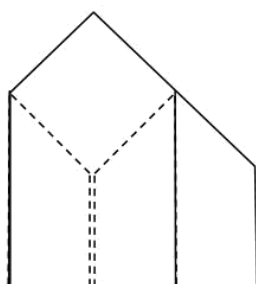
With the house flat on table in front of you, fold over one of the side "wings" till it just touches the pencil line. Crease the fold well then lift up the bottom edge of the paper and tuck the wing inside the house by reversing it's fold direction from "outie" > to "innie" <



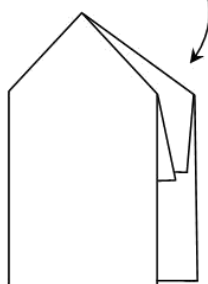
Repeat the same step with the wing on same side of the house.
When you've done both wings, you can erase the pencil line.



Flip the house over so the unfolded wings from the back side are accessible. Fold and tuck each of those wings as well, using the edges of the folded wings from the first side as a guide for where to fold.



You'll know it's right when your "house" looks like this from the side, with the wings tucked "inside"



Glue or tape the house onto your journal page. I put tape along the bottom edge and the roofline.

You can stack several houses on top of each other as well by gluing the back of one house to the front of the house underneath.

Advantages of this fold in a journal:

- ◆ Lets you fit more writing on a page
- ◆ Lets you keep something partially hidden, or make the page more mysterious to view and read
- ◆ Lets you protect something from light or damage