

ARTIST TRADING COINS

A new mini-marvel • by Karen Sweeny-Justice

If you were surprised, as I was, to see a new type of trading item—Artist Trading Coins—mentioned in our Spring 2019 issue, you'll want to join me for a quick journey to discover where they came from and how they got their name!

AN IDEA IS BORN

The earliest reference to ATCoins that I could find online dates to April 28, 2018. That's the day when Joanne Hodges—known as craftyhodges on YouTube—uploaded a video describing how to make them. In that first video, Joanne tells viewers that she “started calling them ATCoins because they are like ATCs (Artist Trading Cards), but in a circular form.”

She went on to say that “they are fun and fast to make and would be super fun to trade.” Oh, and they fit easily into “what we used for pocket letters!” [For information on pocket letters, see “The Art of Pocket Letters” in *RSM*'s Summer 2016 issue.]

Like other creative types before her, Joanne had her ‘ah-ha’ moment in the shower. “I was thinking about Bitcoins, and this led me to think about something I could share with my YouTube subscribers,” she says. “I jumped out of the shower and ran to my craft room to give the idea a try.”

The first name she came up with for her circular card concept was “crafty coins” but realizing their potential for trading, she opted to introduce them to the world as Artist

Trading Coins. And just like that, the Portland, Oregon, artist had created something new!

THE UK CONNECTION

After seeing Joanne's video in July 2018, Teri Whidden of Amherst, Ohio, created ATCoins to share with stamping friends. Inspired, one of her friends, Wanda Leyh, submitted ATCoins for *RSM*'s “Rubber Round-Up” feature (see #203, Spring 2019). Holly Brown also sent in ATCoins, and that's how we, at *RSM*, first learned about this new stamping phenomenon.

“In August 2018, I went to the Stampaway convention in Ohio,” Teri says. “I made coins to swap there, but most of the attendees had not heard about them and weren't sure about trading their traditional ATCs for a coin. There was some confusion until I explained the premise and directed them to the craftyhodges channel on YouTube.”

“I began to notice them featured primarily on some United Kingdom websites I like to visit,” adds Wanda, who lives in Amherst, New York. “The Paper Artsy [blog.paperartsy.co.uk] in particular featured them in the beginning of September, 2018.”

Indeed, it was artist Chris Cresswell, a crafter and blogger in Stone, Stoke-On-Trent, United Kingdom, who referenced Joanne's video while adding her own unique touches to the concept. “I came across ATCoins early in their inception,” Chris told me. “I saw a post which featured a few Joanne created and I just fell in love! I created and promoted them on my own Facebook group: Mini Marvels.”

SIZING THEM UP

Joanne's original size suggestion for ATCoins was 2.5 inches in diameter, which she cut with a punch.

For those without punches, she recommended using die-cut sets, a pencil compass, or the rim of a jar or cup. She also experimented with the different weights of paper and cardstock, starting with single sheets of 110 pound cardstock before using two sheets of heavy paper adhered together. Because Joanne is into using what one has



Hello Foxy / Wanda Leyh
(Stamp credits: All—RubberDance.)



Soul / Karen Sessions
(Stamp credits: All—Blank Page Muse.)

on hand, recycled cereal boxes are even fair game for the base of the coin.

While she was less interested in setting a standard size, most stampers do keep the size of the coin to no more than 2.5-inches in diameter. That has less to do with storage—anything smaller will also fit into a plastic sleeve protector; it's about being able to use existing materials like premade cardstock circles from That's Crafty [www.thatscrafty.co.uk], Joggles [joggles.com], or those found at Etsy stores.

"Some handmade coins may be just a tiny bit larger or smaller," says Holly, who lives in Temple, Texas. "It doesn't affect the artwork on the coins. When hosting coin swaps, we always allow some leeway if someone doesn't have the right size circle punch or die."

SUPPLIES FOR A SMALL CANVAS

When I checked back on Joanne's video in mid-February, the number of page views had risen to 16,000. "I am stunned about the growth of the ATCoins concept," says Joanne. "I had no idea it would take off so fast!"

And take off it has—numerous stamp and papercrafting companies now offer supplies specifically for working on the small, circular canvas.

The growing interest in ATCoins certainly appealed to Kim and Philip Stewart, the owners of Blank Page Muse Art Rubber Stamps [blankpage-muse.com] of Riverside, Cali-



Travel / Kelly Parker
(Stamp credits: All—Blank Page Muse.)



Magic / Jessica Larios
(Stamp credits: All—Blank Page Muse.)

fornia. "We noticed ATCoins were starting to get really popular last summer," says Kim, "so we made some round rubber stamps for the back side of the coins. Like ATCs, it's fun to record a title, the artist's name and stamp or swap information for the trades on the back of the cards. The stamps are sized at 2.375-inches to fit on the standard 2.5-inch coin."

York's Little Art Studio offers precut ATCoin blanks on the company's site (www.etsy.com/shop/YorksLittleArtStudio). Look for the Blank Books/Substrates category.

IN CIRCULATION

An article about ATCoins and a spread of Joanne's artwork appeared in the Fall 2018 issue of *Somerset Studio*. The magazine put ATCoins and Joanne under the heading of "trend alert" and called them "all the rage."

Word of mouth—and blog—spread the idea of creating and swapping ATCoins around the world. One of the first to post a coin challenge was the company Paper Artsy, where the comment was made that "now there is a new trend in swappables."

Chris Cresswell, the UK artist who created the coins Wanda saw on that blog told me that shortly after the blog went live, "Pinterest was crowded with ATCoins!"

Holly, too, participates in regular swaps and offers some tips on mailing the coins. "For group swaps with one hostess and perhaps 20 participants," she says, "mailing 20 coins can be bulky. Most people will place all the coins in a large zip plastic bag and then inside a manila envelope or a plastic bubble wrap envelope."



Floral Trio / Mercy Neumark
(Stamp credits: All—Blank Page Muse.)

“Some people will mail their coins inside a hard plastic case,” she adds. “And I just saw one swap where someone placed her coins in an empty Pringles can for mailing.”

“I mailed mine like a pocket letter to *RSM* for the Rubber Round-Up theme,” says Wanda, “because I wanted to provide a variety to choose from.”

STORAGE AND DISPLAY

Beyond using a Pringles can for mailing, just imagine the many ways a similar container can be adapted and decorated for everyday storage. (If you need help with this project, check out what Denise, a member of the ArtFoamies design team, has posted at <https://www.artfoamies.com/blog/atcoins-storage-container-video-tutorial>.)

In addition, a quick search online revealed not only hundreds of beautiful ATCoins, but thoughtful suggestions for display cases. A few include:

- In January 2019, on a UK blog entitled “New Beginnings, Creating in My Corner” [hotchpotchcreations.blogspot.com], an artist/blogger named Tracey shared a circular wall display shelf perfect for the coins.

- At That’s Crafty [thatscrafty.co.uk] you can purchase a storage tray designed to hold 20 upright ATCoins. As a bonus, the tray itself is meant to be decorated.

- A crafter from Copenhagen, Denmark, posted photos of Steampunk ATCoins she attached to a strip of fabric that could be hung on a wall.

INTO THE FUTURE

We stampers love our projects no matter the size, and incorporating ATCoins into other works of art is moving



Bluebird / Mercy Neumark
(Stamp credits: All—Blank Page Muse.)

them into the future.

“They make cute gift and thank-you tags,” Chris adds. “I love making them, generally alongside a bigger project, like art journaling or mail art, using the same theme and mediums.”

While it remains to be seen how many new ways stampers will approach ATCoins, it’s obvious they’re only going to grow in popularity. “I actually prefer them now to regular ATCs as I love how the shape of them frames the image,” Chris adds.

As I researched ATCoins I discovered many, many sites that feature work all based on Joanne’s ah-ha idea.

And while there are too many to mention, I hope you’ll check them out by searching for ATCoins online.

In the words of a comment I found on The Retro Café Art Gallery’s site, “Thank you, Joanne, for another fun addiction!”

Karen Sweeny-Justice loves the story behind ATCoins, and can’t wait to see what RSM readers do with them!



Just Bee Yourself / Holly Brown
(Stamp credits: Bee, sentiment—Papertrey Ink; honeycomb background—Flourishes.)



Hello / Kim Johnny
(Credits: All stamps—Blank Page Muse; word sticker—Tim Holtz.)