

Art week 15

Cartes de visite

Cartes de visite, complete with a photograph were popular from the 1860s to the 1920s. A carte de visite was a card onto which was attached a picture. The most common size for the card was 10.5 cm x 6.4 cm. The card's owner was depicted posing either alone, or with people important to them. It was popular to pose with a pet or with significant items that suggested a person's profession or hobbies. It was also popular to include beautifully dressed children in the photos.

These cards were the social media of the time: They were very popular, and they were exchanged between friends and acquaintances. 'Visite' means making a social visit. These cards were given out during social visits or were sent in the post.

You can complete this carte de visite activity either by

1. drawing / painting or
2. photographing

First: Click on the [link](#) and familiarise yourself with the collection of cartes du visite on the Museum of Photography's website. Investigate how the people or animals have been arranged: How has the person(s) posed for the photo? How have props been used in relation to the people? What kind of background is used in the photos? What kind of feeling is conveyed by the picture and is there some kind of message that comes from the picture? How has this been achieved? Also, take note of the beautiful tones in the pictures.

Option 1. Use tools for drawing and colouring (your work doesn't have to be black and white) or use mixed technique to make your own carte de visite. The picture can be of yourself, someone from your family, or many people at once. You can also use imaginary people.

2-DIMENSIONAL
PERIOD/
WORKSHOPS

Option 2. Take a picture for your own carte de visite using your phone. The picture can be of yourself, someone from your family, or many people at once. Use the phone's native features or filters and photo-editing tools from apps you're familiar with to make the picture as similar to the cartes de visite from 100 years ago as possible. One way to edit: first change the picture's contrast and brightness to the desired level. You can get black and white by changing the saturation to 0. After this, you can add a filter to the photo (for example, the 'vivid warm' filter on an iPhone or iPad).

Before drawing / photographing, decide whether you are going to make the picture and its feeling 'vintage style' by drawing inspiration from the people in old cards, clothing hairstyles, etc., or will you aim for a modern carte de visite. What kinds of clothes, objects, and animals would a person have now? Think of how the people are posing for the picture. Remember that the composition of the layout, in other words, how you place the objects and the people into the frame has a big impact on the meaning. The layout will create the feeling you want in the picture.

What you need

Option 1. Make the 'card' a little bigger than the vintage photo cards, e.g. A5 or A4

You need paper, pencils (HB and B). You can also use a fine marker, especially if you decide to use mixed technique. You can also use water colours as part of a work of mixed technique or for painting. It is also possible to make a water-colour painting in black and white or grayscale.

Option 2. A phone camera and photo editing applications.

Goal

To apply your observations about vintage cartes de visite to your own design choices. Picture layout skills: How do you place people in the picture? What do you want to say by placing them that way? Also, consider the dynamics created by contrasting colours (e.g., dark/light). If you are making a black and white work of art, practice using different tones.

Background information

You can get information about the history of photographs from the pages of the Photography Museum: [LINK](#)

