



# French Postcards: An Album of Vintage Erotica

*Martin Stevens*

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## **French Postcards: An Album of Vintage Erotica** Martin Stevens

Long before pin-ups, *Playboy*, or the Internet, enterprising Parisians at the turn of the 20th-century turned the relatively new invention of the camera toward the female nude. Artfully posed with classical architecture or in flirtatious dishabille with stockings and lingerie, the winking models embody the erotic fantasies of a repressed society. Some of the women shown are demure and shy, wearing a slip or low-cut blouse—a great tease in an age when showing an ankle was scandalous. Their daring glimpses of décolletage carry a particular charge, so rare in today's world of overexposure. These cards were sold, often in packets, at street kiosks and under tabac counters, hush-hush but nevertheless ubiquitous. As foreigners flooded the city in the early part of the 20th-century, the cards became cherished souvenirs that were secretly collected and shared among men abroad. This is when the phrase "French postcards" became a euphemistic code for erotic nude images. These lovely ladies evoke a campy nostalgia that celebrates a healthy, voluptuous ideal of sensual feminine beauty. More retro than raunchy, *French Postcards* has the saucy fun of a naughty valentine, sure to charm and entertain a friend or lover.

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