

Suitscapes

Landscapes of suits

Suitscapes

In Suitscapes the user shuffles through the history and symbolism of card suits, exploring their associations with seasons, natural elements, and human emotions.

The project draws on four historical decks, Latin, Swiss-German (Jass), French and Hanafuda. Integrating Hanafuda brings a non-European perspective with a less anthropocentric approach, and an alternative to the standard four-suit system.





The Interface - Key visuals



User Journey

0. Welcome

The user is welcomed by four rotating suits — one from each deck (Hanafuda, Latin, French, Jass) — waving “Hello,” with falling cards from these decks surrounding them.

1. Invitation

By waving back “Hello” to the suits, the quest begins.

2. Discovery

Each deck introduces the user to its suits, explaining the suit-based mechanism that defines a card game: four suits for the European decks, and twelve for the Japanese Hanafuda — one for each month.

3. Emotion

After this introduction, the initial four suits each express a specific emotion associated with them: love, joy, sadness, and anger.

4. Resonance

By imitating one of the suggested emotions, the user unlocks the corresponding seasonal landscape of the chosen suit's deck. Each suit is linked to a specific season.

5. Exploration

Following and painting along the “suit-friend” path, the user reveals humans, animals, and information about the deck.

6. Challenge

Accompanied by their suit, the user must catch the season's element within 10 seconds. They have three lives to complete this mini-game.

7. Transition

Catching the element grants access to the next seasonal universe of the next deck.

8. Completion

After traversing all four seasons (spring, summer, autumn, and winter) and collecting all four elements (fire, water, earth, air), the suits reunite to celebrate the completion of the quest.

Field observations

Our research examined the symbolism of suits, focusing primarily on European four-suit card decks and European-inspired card decks, like the Japanese Hanafuda.

Insights

1. Suits. Depending on the deck's origin, different suit symbols and varying numbers of suits have been used. In European and European-inspired standard decks, there are typically four suits.

2. Seasons and the classical elements. By 1582, the Gregorian calendar was largely adopted by Europe, so playing cards began to correlate with the year, the seasons, and the solstices. The four suits represent the four seasons/solstices or the four phases of the moon. Suits may also parallel the four elements found in nature: hearts for water, clubs for fire, diamonds for earth and spades for air. The twelve royals (King, Queen, and Jack), represent the twelve months of the year, each suit of thirteen cards represents the thirteen weeks in each season.

Before 1873 and the adaptation of the Gregorian calendar, the Japanese calendar was based on the Chinese solar-lunar calendar, which took into account the movements of both the Earth around the Sun, and the Moon around the Earth. Hanafuda cards are organized in twelve suits that correspond to months of the year, each month represented with a flowering plant.

In tarot the suits represent the four elements – swords (thoughts or air), cups (emotions or water), coins/pentacles (material aspects or earth), and batons/wands (actions or fire).

3. Social classes and emotions. Suits have been associated also to social classes, hearts or cups symbolized the clergy, diamonds or coins represented the merchant class and wealth, spades or swords stood for the nobility/aristocracy or the warrior class, and clubs or wands symbolized the peasantry or those who worked the land.

Drawing on the suits' social symbolism and their hypothesized emotional associations with social classes, a matrix can be established that links each suit to a corresponding set of emotions.

4. Quatrums System. Building on the correspondences between suits, seasons, and classical elements, as well as the associations linking suits to social classes and emotions, we developed a four-quatrums parameter system in our project. This system integrates four suits, four seasons, four classical elements, and four emotions. An exception is made for the Hanafuda deck, which follows a twelve-suit structure.

Hearts → clergy, spiritual matters, social relationships

Diamonds → merchants, wealth, material life

Spades → nobility, conflict, power struggles

Clubs → peasants, work, growth, effort



Hearts → love, calm, serenity, trust, respect, inspiration

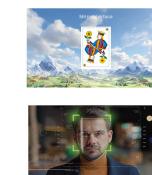
Diamonds → ambition, security, pride, desire

Spades → confidence, pride, exhilaration, dominance, tension anxiety, frustration

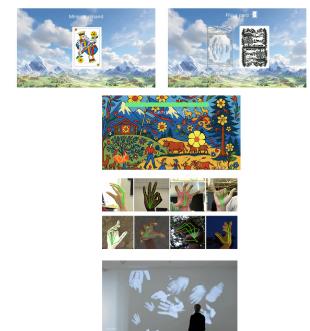
Clubs → determination, perseverance, satisfaction, achievement



Facial recognition

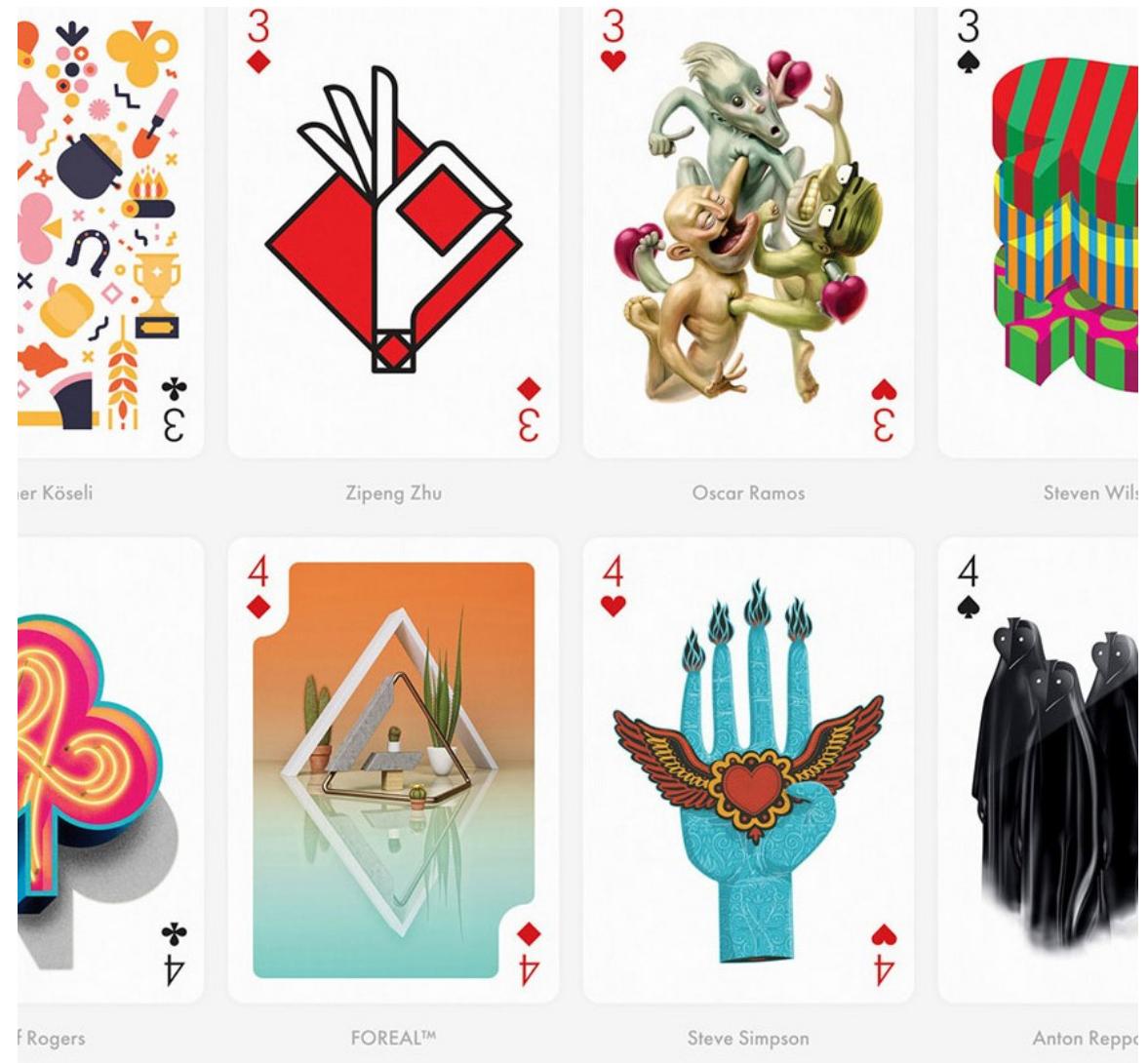
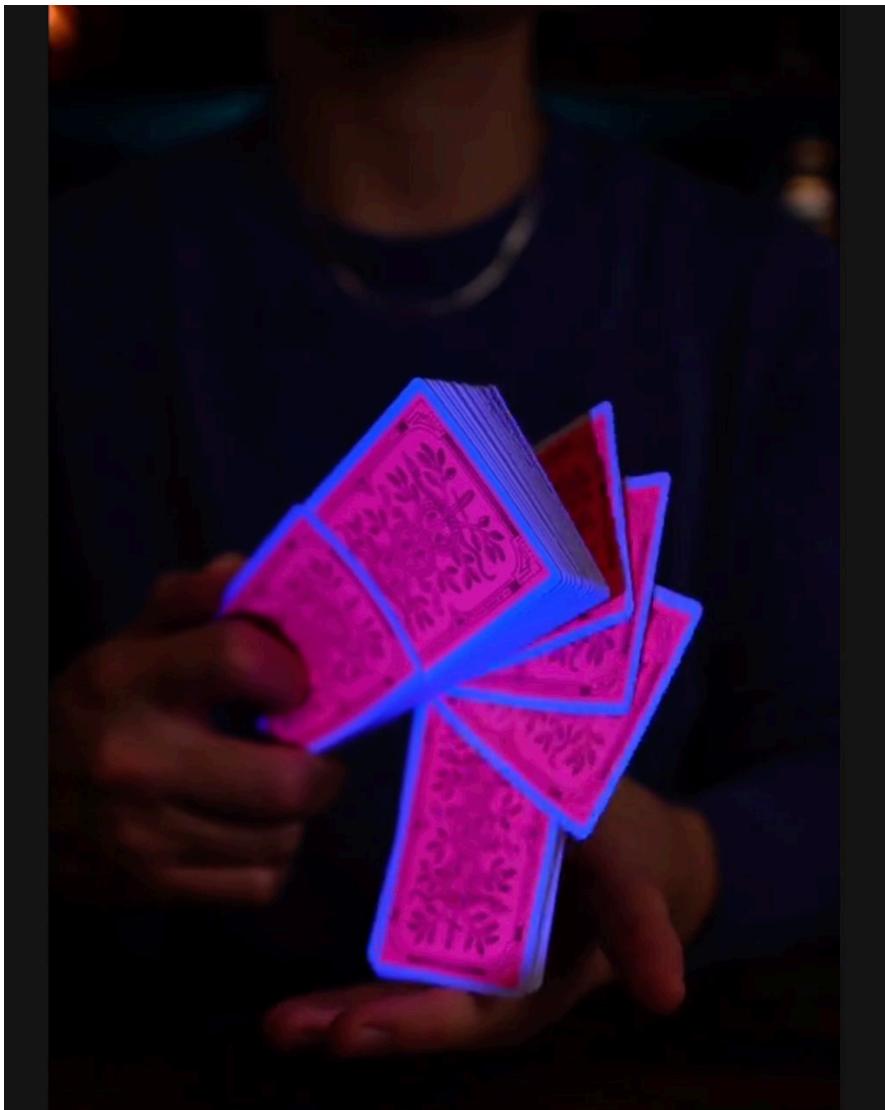


Hand motion recognition



Latin card suits											
Italian ^[1]	Clubs (Bastoni)	Cups (Coppe)	Swords (Spade)	Cone (Dadi)							
Spanish ^[2]	Clubs (Ramos)	Cups (Copas)	Swords (Espadas)	Cone (Oros)							
Portuguese ^[3]	Clubs (Paus)	Cups (Copas)	Swords (Espadas)	Cone (Ouros)							
Comparison of German, French and Swiss suits ^[4]											
Swiss-German ^[5]	Aromi ^[6]	Sheaf ^[7]	Rose ^[8]	Bells ^[9]							
German	Aromi ^[6]	Heart ^[10]	Leaves ^[11]	Bells ^[9]							
French	Club (Clubs)	Hearts [12]	Flax [13]	Tiles (Diamonds) [14]							
Karuta suits											
Komatsu-fuda	Clubs [15]	Cups [16]	Swords [17]	Coins [18]	Quin						
Unsun-Kanita	Clubs [19]	Cups [20]	Swords [21]	Coins [22]	Quin						
Kabufuda	Clubs [23]	Cups [24]	Swords [25]	Coins [26]	Quin						
Hanafuda ^[27]	Pine ^[28]	Plum ^[29]	Cherry ^[30]	Waterlily ^[31]	Iris ^[32]	Peony ^[33]	Bath-Clover ^[34]	Susuki ^[35]	Chrysanthemum ^[36]	Maple ^[37]	Willow ^[38]





User Tests

Several user tests were conducted using the developed prototypes at different stages of the project. Two main test sessions took place: one in collaboration with the museum on 17 October 2025, and another one week before the final presentation, on 6 November 2025.

The main objectives of these sessions were to collect feedback on:

- the content and concept,
- the interactive aspects, and
- the multi-projection installation idea.

Feedback was positive regarding the concept of seasonal landscapes linked to the different decks. However, throughout all test iterations we were challenged on two key points: the integration of emotions and the number and type of interaction gestures. This led to several design adjustments. We reduced both the number and categories of interactions and refined the emotion simulation to make it more intuitive and fluid for the user.





Scenography



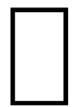
Spatial diagram



User stands here 2m from central projection



Camera attached with magic arm on top of the central projection

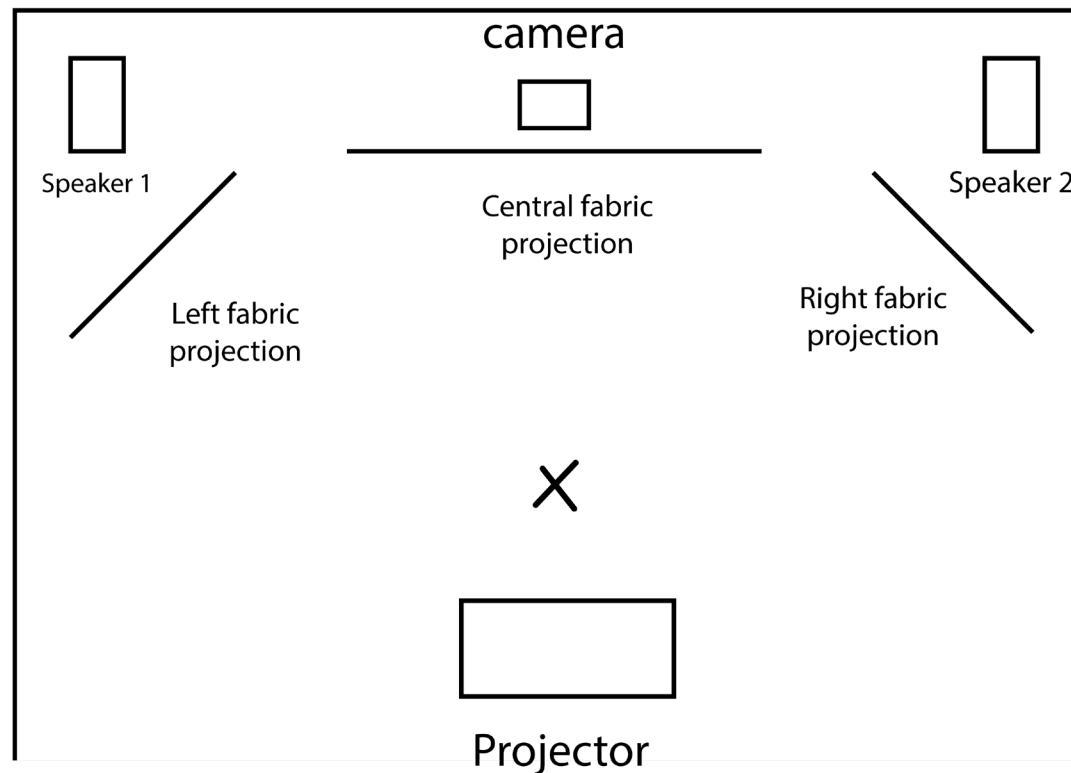


Speaker behind left and right fabric projection

Floor area: 2300 x 1500mm

Installation structure

- 3 white cotton tissue panels: Center:
140x120mm; Left & Right: 70x125mm



Technical diagram

Floor area: 2300x1500 mm

Installation structure

- 3 white cotton tissue panels: Center: 140x120mm;

Left & Right: 70x125mm

Projection & Display

- 1 projector
- 1 HDMI cable
- 1 laptop

Audio

- 2 speakers
- 1 stereo mini-jack

Tracking

- 1 webcam
- 1 magic arm for

Software

- Google Chrome
- MadMapper

Power & Connectivity

- 1 USB-C multiport hub (HDMI, USB-A)
- Power cables, extension cords

