

Personalised stamps in a thematic exhibit

by Peter Lang

Many postal services today offer the possibility of creating one's own postage stamp. For the Post Office it is a supplemental business, not aimed primarily at philatelists but rather at individual customers looking for an original gift or souvenir for the birth of a child, the birthday of a grandparent, or the anniversary of, say, a choral society.

Needless to say, this opportunity has also been exploited by philatelic societies, for whom the income from such stamps is often necessary to finance their activities. In Germany the price of such an 'individual stamp' depends on the number of stamps ordered. For smaller orders a stamp with a postage value of €0.55 can cost €2.00, so it is not unusual for the 'issuing authority' to charge €2.50 or €3.00 per stamp.

For collectors and exhibitors the question is how to deal with such stamps.

In general, collecting is an individual hobby, in which one may express one's own ideas, and thereby define and follow one's own criteria. Anyone who wants to obtain a personalised stamp for his collection is free

to do so, and must decide for himself if the stamp is worth the price asked, knowing that such stamps are probably not likely to gain significantly in value.

For the exhibitor who wants to include a personalised stamp in an exhibit the matter is somewhat different.



Suitable for exhibit: Details of peps not available otherwise



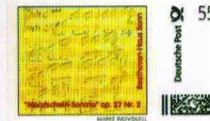
Not suitable: Better material is available for a portrait of Mozart

The most important criterion is the topical significance: what does the stamp show? Does the stamp enhance the theme? If the stamp shows a thematic aspect or thematically interesting detail not offered by any other philatelic item such as a stamp, postmark or postal stationery, then it may be included in the exhibit. But if it is the umpteenth repetition of a Mozart portrait, it will not add value to the exhibit. The rules state that for each thematic detail the most suitable item must be chosen, and therefore an official stamp or postal stationery item is preferable to a personalised stamp. Thus the thematic aspect should already play an important role in the design by the person 'issuing' a personalised stamp!

In the assessment of a thematic exhibit the 'issuer' is of no importance. It makes no difference whether it is a so-called 'edition' of the Austrian state printing company, or the issue of a philatelic society, or a stamp printed by order of an individual collector: in the eyes of the jury all issuers are equal.

From a philatelic point of view there can be no objection to the inclusion of personalised stamps in a thematic exhibit. If they are ordered through a post office, printed with postal authorization, and – most importantly – if they are valid for postage, then they must be recognised as philatelic material. It does not matter whether the 'post' involves an official postal authority or a private postal service.

When the above criteria are met, a personalised stamp can enhance the philatelic diversity of an exhibit. However, at present, and possibly for the foreseeable future, the inclusion of personalised stamps is not a 'must' and cannot compensate for



the absence of other philatelic elements, such as meter cancellations or booklets. Nor can the fact that the exhibitor shows,

by including a personalised stamp, that he is aware of the possibilities of personal stamps, be regarded as evidence of philatelic knowledge.

The philatelic significance of personalised stamps should not be valued very highly. Although its worth is somewhat increased when it used on a mailed cover, an official issue with a similar thematic subject will always be preferable to a personalised stamp.



Further, a distinction should be made between personalised stamps on which the personal design is confined to a separate label or margin only, as in Belgium, or where the stamp design itself may be freely designed, as in Austria. Personally, in a thematic exhibit I would give preference to the latter.

A final criterion relevant for us in an exhibit is 'condition' and 'rarity'. The prerequisite for modern items is perfect condition and needs no further explanation. The criterion 'rarity' is more subjective. Personalised stamps commissioned by an individual in limited quantities will always be rare, but this will not increase the points awarded for an exhibit, for anyone can now produce a 'unique' stamp. What is more, a jury will generally give fewer

points for rarity if the rare items in the exhibit contribute little to the overall philatelic picture. In other words, the rarity of personalised stamps cannot compensate for the absence of traditionally rare philatelic items.



Taiwan: Personalised margin – stamp adds no thematic value. Not suitable for a thematic exhibit on Music.

In summary, the question whether an exhibitor may include personalised stamps in an exhibit can be answered with a clear "Yes, but ...". Such stamps may be used in an exhibit, but only when they add thematic value that cannot be achieved with traditional philatelic material. In addition, their numbers should be limited to two or three items at most



中國郵政明信片
Postcard
The People's Republic of China



China: Personalised postal stationery – not suitable for exhibit as better postal material showing Beethoven is available.

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