

ORBIT

Astro Space Stamp Society

Universe of Errors

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Liberec 2022 - where does Philately want to go?



Umberto Cavallaro reports on his visit to the European Stamp Exhibition "Liberec 2022", which was held in the Czech Republic last year in October.

LIBEREC 2022, the FEPA exhibition, this year – after two years of forced lockdown due to the Covid emergency – has attracted 238 exhibitors (plus 19 in the "Polar Hall") from all over Western and Eastern Europe, including Ukraine (but also from North America, Australia, China, Israel, Oman and United Arab Emirates). 1139 frames were on show.

Also were on show 19 astrophilathic exhibits, reduced to 18 when an exhibitor, who arrived on the scene in Liberec with his collection, was promoted, at the last minute, as "apprentice juror" and changed his role, leaving empty his designated exhibition frame-space.

ASITAF members

This was the most numerous astrophilately exhibition in the last 20 years, belatedly introduced as "Class No. 10", at the request of ASITAF, which did its utmost to ensure a wide participation: and in fact 10 out of the 18 exhibitors were ASITAF members.

Unfortunately, the organization was imprecise and sloppy, not a standard expected of the Czech Republic.

All the exhibits were compressed into old-fashioned frames, 95 cm x 110 cm (instead of 120, as required by the formats currently in use) so the A4 format sheets had to be compressed and partially overlapped, making it impossible to read the bottom rows of each page.



The rows of Frames

The Philatelic Items

A juror told me that to avoid this issue, covers should not be placed above, but below the texts. I had to explain to him that, as far as I know, in astrophilately – as that is in all classes – the philatelic items (in our case the covers) are the main element, and a competent juror looks at these first, and judges their peculiarities (starting from authenticity) and their suitability to develop the chosen topic, as indicated in the title and in the plan. The reading of the text takes place after, also to measure the KNOWLEDGE of the exhibitor.

According to the "planning" of this exhibition, the frames were arranged one after the other, without any care, breaking up many exhibits that continued in the next row, which was not where you would expect them to be.

It also happened that an astrophilathic exhibit was

mounted somewhere else, in the midst of thematic philately, making it practically impossible to find, and it was exchanged with the thematic exhibit by the same Exhibitor. The thematic exhibit stood out instead among the astrophilathic collections of the last row. Repeated reports were made to the organisers in vain, during the four days of the

"The thematic exhibit stood out instead among the astrophilathic collections of the last row"

exhibition. For them evidently one thing was as good as another: being both 5-frames-collections, they somehow filled the paid spaces, and for the organisational bureaucracy everything was in

order even so!

Apprentice Jurors

Unfortunately, even the Astrophilately Jury-team, made up of 4 members, 2 of whom were added as "Apprentice Jurors", proved to be a bit overhasty, to say the least. It must be said that the overlapping of the sheets in the frames did not help them much. It must also be added that it was the first

time that the new guidelines were officially applied in a FEPA exhibition, with some confusion and free interpretation, and with the jurors of the different classes "controlling" each other.

One of our two "formally appointed" jurors, an expert in postal history and aerophilately, confessed to me that he had never collected – much less exhibited – astrophilately. Perhaps it was also the first time he had seen real-life astrophilately collections, which don't seem to be very popular in Norway. But he ensured me that he had read the new Guidelines...!

probably unnoticed by any of the four jurors (judging by the score awarded), was present in one of the exhibits. The exhibit belonged to a well-known collector who at his home is also an astrophilately juror, and who was able to add, again unnoticed, several covers that have nothing to do with astrophilately, including those shown on the next page.

Also there was on show another well-known exhibit that I had already seen in Gmunden, Austria, in 2015

“to do this the jurors must be either retired or they must have nothing else to do”

misunderstanding about what “rarity” should be, according to the Guidelines.

Let's hope that it was due to the haste, because – the jurors told me – they had not been able to spend more than 10 minutes in front of each collection.

Regarding the "lack of time to evaluate the collections in detail", I explained to the jurors the practice used in Italy where collectors, after the acceptance of their exhibits, are invited to send the scan of the collection they will exhibit.

The jurors then, since no one can be expected to know everything, can study the collections that they have to evaluate and have time to document themselves on the more doubtful aspects. The reply I immediately received was that “to do this the jurors must be either retired or they must have nothing else to do”.

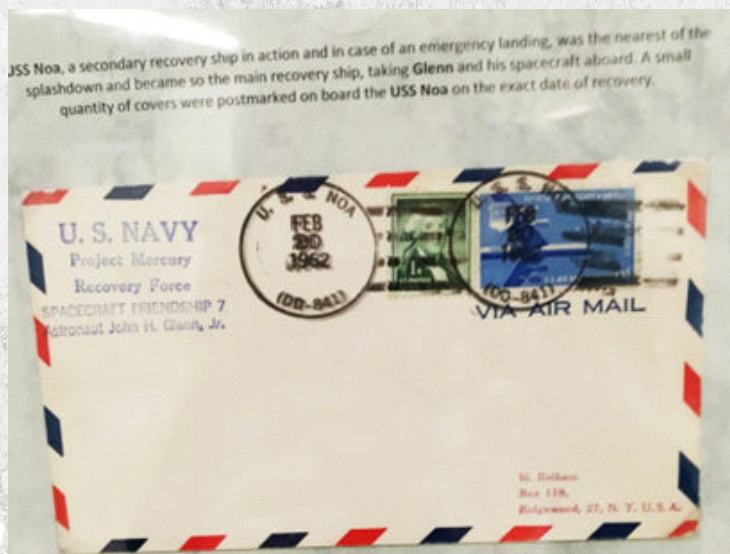
Soviet Astrophilathy

Certainly in the Jurors Team there was a well-known expert in Russian and Soviet astrophilathy, who had however a couple of problems: his English was poor, he was penalised by the "organisational" problems already mentioned, which prevented him from reading the descriptive texts.

One wonders on which basis the jurors managed to judge the exhibits on display. Let's say that the quartet proved to have a strong aesthetic sense.

Astrophilately Exhibits

The collections were first looked at from afar, and judged "boring", because – as they explained to me – almost all the sheets presented with two aligned envelopes and, seen from a distance, they formed a series of vertical columns “without movement” : This led automatically to the loss of one point in the PRESENTATION criterium,



As widely documented in the literature, this is not a genuine cover, as stated by the exhibitor, but is one of the 300 backdated covers, in which the “PM” was removed.

I had to argue with a juror who claimed that fakes are a Soviet problem, and I told him about the Chinese forged cancels, and US fake covers by Riser (for which Riser himself was imprisoned) and about the counterfeit NOA covers that are widely documented in literature (including two books that I myself wrote on these topics¹). One of these covers,

¹See, for example, *Umberto Cavallaro, The Race to the Moon Chronicled in Stamps, Postcards, and Postmarks, Springer, New York 2018, p 133-136; Umberto Cavallaro, Propaganda e Pragmatismo. In gara per la conquista della luna, Impremix. Torino, 2011, p. 66-68*

In Antwerp I counted in this exhibit more than 100 irrelevant items. These were reduced, but not entirely removed after I reported it in person to the concerned collector who, after thanking me, decided at the last minute to reduce his exhibit in Liberec from 8 to 5 frames, leaving 3 empty frames).

Apart from these, I have seen many well organised collections with rigorous and original studies, ill-treated without even reading them. It was sometimes difficult to read the texts, due to the overlapping of the pages, as mentioned above. Perhaps there was also some degree of

and revisited this year in Antwerp, Belgium, where it was awarded a large gold medal, and in any case it was held in some regard also here in Liberec, despite the many items that are not allowed in astrophilately, such as those indicated on page 35, and many others.

Concerned Collector



Two well-known envelopes that have nothing to do with astrophilately, even if they are cancelled at Port Canaveral.

and consequently all 18 astrophilately exhibits received "4" points for the PRESENTATION.

On the last day, I showed up on time at 10:00, to meet the Jury who – as preannounced – were available from 10 to 12. Being the first, I had the chance to meet all four jurors together.

Personally I chose, as I have been doing for years, to show two exhibits with unusual topics, to demonstrate that there is more to the story than the USSR and the USA. My first exhibit "Italy in Space" was awarded a medal two levels lower than the evaluation received a few years earlier in the Prague Eurospace 2016, with FEPA recognition. In Prague it obtained a gold medal (same award as in Antwerp a few months ago) and a special Jury Prize. The first remarks regarding this exhibit was that it lacked a structure with numbered points to schematically guide through its development.

This is not required and/or specified anywhere in our standards. The plan, supposedly, had to be divided into numbered points, and the numbers had to be repeated in the header of

each page, so that the jurors could quickly identify each "chapter" and subchapters, as they have limited time.

Pythagorean Table

Since almost all the exhibitors (including myself) had listed and numbered the points in which the collection was divided, as it is common sense, but no one had repeated the numbers in each page header because they were already promptly recognisable, anyway. This obsession with the Pythagorean table automatically gave every exhibit from the start a penalty of at least three points in TREATMENT.

Postal History

Apart from repeating the story of the numbers to the point of boredom, no one was able to give me a single piece of advice on how to improve the poor score obtained in terms of PHILATELIC KNOWLEDGE AND PERSONAL STUDY.

While I was addressing the juror, expert in postal history, with a question, he took off to greet a friend of his who was passing by in the corridor, and he hasn't been seen since.

Nobody, and I should say even less so, was able to give me advice on how to improve my other exhibit "China - a Long March to the Moon", which I built with the help and advice of 4 of the most experienced Chinese astrophilatelists. Without further explanation, apart from the usual Pythagorean table, "China", which in the previous national exhibition was awarded a large gold

medal with Jury Felicitation – not an everyday thing – was dropped by three levels.

At around 11 the Accredited Juror also left us, because – despite his nominal availability until noon, as initially stated – he had to leave. And I remained with the two, friendly available apprentice jurors.

Written Evaluation

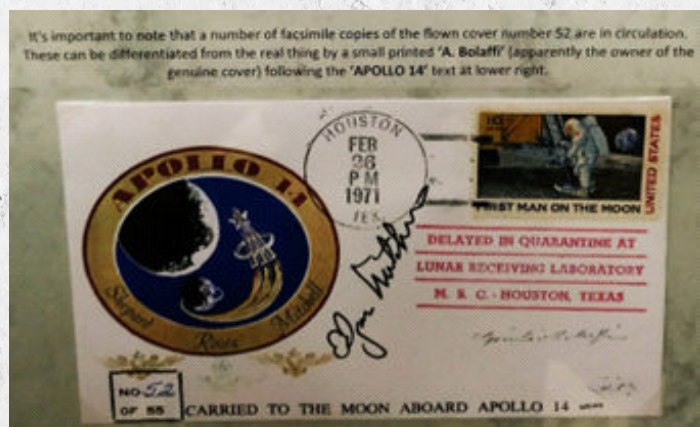
In the end I managed to get, also for the other ASITAF exhibits, the "breakdown" scores (which are "confidential"), but not the written remarks because – they told me – "at international exhibitions the Jury's feed-back is given only verbally in front of the frames; no written evaluation sheet is issued".

But even in front of the frames, except for the PRESENTATION and TREATMENT, boring was one of the most recurring terms. I had no other remark.

I wondered more than once: are we in a philately exhibition or in an art gallery?

I must say that this was the

"In the end I managed to get, also for the other ASITAF exhibits, the breakdown scores"



One of the famous "Magdeburg replicas" of Mitchell's envelope 52 which, being a color copy made on an envelope (like the stamp), is not a postal item and cannot be included in a proper collection (apart from other trivia: every collector should at least know that Alberto Bolaffi is a known philately dealer).

first international event in which I have not learned anything.

I came out with many doubts that for now – despite the fact that my dialogue with these jurors is still continuing, by mail and by phone – I have not yet managed to resolve. Probably the issues are at a higher level.

Looking at the results published on the official website of the event², it seems in fact that something similar happened in all of the 10 classes.

International Exhibition

One wonders: is it possible that out of 238 collections of an international exhibition, where the best is usually presented, only 8 exhibits deserved the Large Gold? Participating in these exhibitions is challenging both from a logistical and economic point of view, and a collector thinks twice before going in blindly with a badly thrown together collection.

exhibitor whom I don't know; embittered after having collected his own, he was coming away and dragged his trolley: for a moment we looked at each other and – shaking his head – he grumbled "never again!".

In my mind I went back to fifteen years ago, when I founded ASITAF, starting from a pile of rubble and building it up on the ruins left by old-fashioned jurors with their punitive approach. In many countries, not only in Europe, that once had hundreds of collectors, little by little astrophilatelists had stopped exhibiting and started to sell their collections.

Today, to speak about astrophilately alone, a sector I know quite well, in many European countries there is only one exhibitor left. Two

collect smart-phones than stamps).

"For a moment we looked at each other and – shaking his head – he grumbled never again!"

And if there is an interest in developing philatelic collecting (or even just to make it survive), why go against those who have been there for years, and then spend a huge amount of energy in identifying a potential "young collector" whose "training" will take a long time, with uncertain outcomes?

Like The Panda

As I have been repeating for years, philatelists in general, and astrophilatelists in particular, should be treated as an endangered species, "like the panda". In the age of globalisation, I heard at least a couple of our jurors saying that since this was an international event



Contrary to what is stated in our rules, we have seen in Liberec "astrophilately" exhibits that were NOT a "philatelic study of the historical, scientific and technical progress achieved in the exploration of space" (as per the definition of ASTROPHILATELY given in our Guidelines). Instead, they were "showcases of rarities", that included stamps recalling anniversaries, first-day covers issued over 70 years ago, simple pictures of flown envelopes taken on the ISS, expensive handwritten letters by Von Braun, original drawings by Tsiolkovski, astronomers and old style visionaries from time past, etc.. Also there were some fancyful titles, difficult to reconcile with the factual approach that should characterise our Class. Unfortunately, other very rigorous and original studies were mistreated and remained unread.

And how is it possible that over 30% were awarded a level from the Large Silver to lower down levels? What is the strategy behind this strictness?

While entering the room to collect my exhibits, I saw an

² <https://www.liberec2022.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Liberec2022EuropeanStampExhibitionResults3-1.pdf>

in Russia. Only one in the United States. In some countries not even one.

Looking around it is clear that collectors are dwindling and philately is disappearing. Much is said at conferences and much is written in specialized articles on how to attract new collectors, especially young people (who are actually more likely to

they had to be more rigorous with their judgments.. But they were not able to explain why (only I heard some unmentionable reason).

One should indeed wonder, if this were true, how many, of those who have left shaking their heads, should be expected to return to exhibit again internationally. Or maybe the belief is that



Jurors checking the panels.

philately can survive without collectors...

Committed Collector

If we want this hobby to survive, we probably need to change perspective, bearing in mind that at the centre of the play is the collector. Of course, we are talking about the serious and committed collector who, not only invests in talent, time and resources, but does it by

knowing and applying the rules.

As I have already said on other occasions, there are several things to change, e.g.:
 - Establishing rules to be able to offer the service of competent jurors (for example, a juror who has never even exhibited in a particular class should not be appointed);

- Using some resources for training jurors, chosen among service-minded experts who intend to devote time to the task, leaving out those who do not have the time;

- Adopting suitable procedures that allow expert jurors to carefully study and evaluate the collections, considering that these often represent the result of years of effort and study;

- Applying the existing rules transparently, in a consistent way both nationally and internationally, without restrictive imaginary interpretations;

- Giving the collector/exhibitor feedback with clear messages and useful evaluations/suggestions for

improvement, in a true spirit of service.

Pros and Cons

Every strategy has pros and cons. While scanning the collections and leaving them online, as happens in my Country, costs time and effort, but facilitates the work of the Jurors, and promotes transparency, allowing one to see what has been exhibited and to compare, even after years, the exhibits on display, and also weight the evaluations expressed, the advantage of the approach chosen by International Organisations is to leave no tracks.

You have to decide what and whom you want to privilege.

Where does Philately want to go?



Stamp issued for Liberec 2022.

Cassini's Grand Finale

By Nik Steggall

NASA's Cassini spacecraft had been in space for nearly 20 years with 13 of those orbiting Saturn. In 2017 Cassini's fuel was running out so a solution was needed to prevent the possibility that Cassini could impact on one the moons of Saturn that could have the possibility of life and therefore contaminate it.

In particular the ice covered, ocean moon of Enceladus and Titan with its intriguing pre-biotic chemistry. In view of this a plan was devised to make the most of Cassini's last months before it was deliberately sent on a

destructive entry through the atmosphere of Saturn to be burnt up and its demise would be in a safe manner.

Cassini made 5 passes

From April to September 2017, a series of dives between Saturn and its rings would be made, this had not been attempted before. This new mission would see a series of 22 weekly dives between the planet and its rings. Of these Cassini made 5 passes through the upper atmosphere coming to within 1,012

miles (1,628 km) of Saturn's clouds. Passing through a gap of 1,500 miles (2,400 km) it made 4 passes through Saturn's innermost D ring, all this at a top speed of 76,806 mph (123,608 kph).



Cassini between Saturn and the rings.