

# ORBIT

Astro Space Stamp Society

**Apollo-Soyuz  
Test Project  
(ASTP) 50 years  
on**

**Voyager 1  
space probe  
breaks record  
of  
5 billion km  
travelled from  
Earth**





# ASTP: the handshake in space that changed the course of history

by Umberto Cavallaro



*Apollo-Soyuz Test Project mission patch.*

The important historical undertaking was part of the agreement signed on 24 May 1972 between Nixon and Kosygin, in a period still strongly marked by the tensions of the Cold War. After 15 years of heated competition between the US and the USSR, even in space we were able to witness the political thaw between the two Superpowers and this paved the way for future space collaborations.

The docking between the two spacecraft was made possible by a special docking module developed jointly.

The warm, highly symbolic handshake between the two commanders of the Soviet spacecraft



*The historical handshake between Leonov and Stafford in the tunnel that connected the two spacecraft.*

**Aleksej Archipovič Leonov** and the American **Tom Stafford**, in the tunnel that connected the two spacecraft, was rehearsed dozens



*Russian commemorative cover with President Nixon signing the US-USSR Space Treaty.*

of times in the simulator on Earth to find the best angle for filming and was followed by the first international press conference broadcast from space. For the first time, a Soviet space launch was broadcast worldwide live on TV.

In April 1975, in preparation for the launch of ASTP, a post office was set up in Baykonur. To celebrate the historic event, the Soviets wanted to fly philatelic covers. The plan was for the covers to be cancelled at Baikonur before the launch, then – after the Apollo-Soyuz docking – in the international cosmic post office (which was never set up) and, finally, onboard the American recovery ship, after splashdown.

NASA, however, still under the shock of the Apollo 15 scandal, rejected the proposal. Nevertheless, cosmonaut Valery Kubasov, Leonov's Soviet colleague who was a rebellious spirit, decided to bring on board 25 covers<sup>[1]</sup> which were signed in orbit by the entire crew.

It is known that, in addition to these “official” covers, an unspecified number of other “clandestine” envelopes were placed in the spacecraft, which were subsequently “certified” by cosmonaut Georgy Beregovoy, at the time





One of the 25 covers flown into space during the ASTP mission. Kubasov put on the cover the hand written the annotation: "On board Soyuz-Apollo 18.07.75, 1.30 Moscow time". The cover was autographed in space by the two cosmonauts Kubasov and Leonov and by the three astronauts Stafford, Slayton and Brand before they parted.

Director of the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center, who had the words ЛЕТАЛО И ПОДПИСАНО В КОСМОСЕ – "flown and signed in space" – added, and authenticated them with his autograph. Later also Kubasov confirmed that these covers were onboard.

There was lot of excitement for this joint mission, both in the USA and in the USSR. Accomplished space artists represented it in different ways. I like to recall the cartoon by Paul Calle, the designer of the popular U.S. postage stamp FIRST MAN ON THE MOON (1969) – perhaps the most well known US stamp in the world – who also was the first honorary member of ASITAF, the Italian Astrophilately Society.



Cartoon by Paul Calle.



Paul, who had the privilege to sketch the Apollo 11 crew as they had breakfast on the morning of lift-off of the first lunar mission, represents himself in the cartoon while participating in the mission to record the historic first festive

Paul Calle's self-portrait in the postmark.



Flown Apollo-Soyuz cover certified by Beregovoy

meeting of the astronauts and cosmonauts together in space. We used a self-portrait of Paul, offered by his son Chris Calle, in a pictorial postmark to commemorate the first Honorary Member of the ASITAF when he passed away in 2011.



Apollo-Soyuz stamps were issued simultaneously on 15 July 1975 in both the USSR and the USA.

For the first time, the USA and the USSR agreed on a joint philatelic issue: a se-tenant pair of stamps designed respectively by the Soviet artist **Anatoly Aksamit** who drew the two spaceships "before link-up" and by the American designer **Robert McCall** who was entrusted with the creation of the stamp vignette "after link-up". The stamps were issued simultaneously on 15 July 1975 in both the USSR and the USA.

The Soviet Union also issued in those days other stamps featuring the launch of the Soyuz, the 5 crew members, the Mission Control Center and the docking of the two spacecraft, designed by cosmonaut Alexei Leonov who was also known as a fine artist (below the stamps signed by him). ASTP became in the years a very popular topic for stamp collectors.



The Soviet Union also issued other stamps featuring respectively the launch of the Soyuz





Above: quadrate of the stamp by Leonov and the Soviet Union also issued a souvenir sheet for the launch of the Soyuz

I asked our friend Peter Hoffman – the renowned philately collector specialising in space and astronomy related stamps, in particular Apollo 11<sup>[2]</sup> – for some data on the ASTP stamps issued on these 50 years.

He provided accurate figures: 605 ASTP were issued in total in 43 Countries

268 stamps not commemorating an anniversary  
218 issued on or near the mission year

- 13 10th anniversary
- 8 20th anniversary
- 52 25th anniversary
- 20 30th anniversary
- 25 40th anniversary
- 1 50th anniversary

Surprisingly, only Russia issued a stamp to celebrate the 50th ASTP anniversary, however not in the exact date, but at the end of July. Nothing in the States.



On the left, the emblem designed by Leonov (from his personal collection), on the right the official emblem designed by Bob McCall.

ASTP was the first Soviet mission to have a crew patch in their history. The original version of the ASTP emblem was designed in the States by Jean Pinataro of North American Rockwell, the prime contractor for the Apollo CSM. But his initial version submitted in May 1974 for approval by JSC Director Chris Kraft was rejected by NASA, because “for a project of great international significance it was necessary to depict something more significant”.

The same patch was submitted again, without change, in mid-June by the crew stating that they had reconsidered the design, and felt that it did, in fact, reflect the international flavor of the space mission.

After the NASA’s firm refusal in August, the emblem was then redesigned by removing the hammer and sickle flag, and reworking a painting that Robert McCall had worked on when he was preparing the stamp, and it was finally granted. This confirms once more what Walt Cunningham underlines in his book “The All-American Boys”: The ASTP mission was mainly an entirely political endeavour.<sup>[3]</sup>

The elements of the national flag motifs that were removed from the American patch were instead taken up again by the Soviets when they decided for the first time to design their own Soviet crew patch.

Also Alexei Leonov, who was a renowned artist, decided to work on the idea of the American and Soviet flags of the Apollo Soyuz Test Project.

[1] see U. Cavallaro and W. Hopperwieser “Little known ASTP flown covers” in AD\*ASTRA #5, Mar 2010, p. 2-5 and in ASTROPHILE # 312, Feb 2012, p. 55-57.

[2] Peter Hoffman worked in the 1960s for Grumman Aerospace, the builder of the Lunar Module. His group was responsible for the guidance system of the lunar landing. He was also part of the team that worked on the safe return of Apollo 13.

[3] Walter Cunningham, “The All-American Boys”, Ibooks, NY 2003, p. 333-359.

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ASTP flag, from the personal collection of Alexei Leonov.