

Stamp Designs Take a Different Direction

The RSA/Royal Mail Student Bursary Design Award winners are announced
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For five days between 23-27 May, the Pentagram Gallery in London's Notting Hill district became home to an exhibition relating to the postage stamp. Unusually, there were no stamp dealers or even collectors present, but this apparent anomaly is easily explained.

Each year since 1971, Royal Mail has sponsored a stamp design competition in association with the Royal Society of Arts, which was last reported in the *Bulletin* of May 1997. The first bursary was for a set of four stamps with the theme of industrial archaeology and David Gentleman was one of the judges of the 76 entries received. This year, the number of entries was in the region of 200, reflecting the growing importance that some students and their tutors attach to this specialised area of the graphic arts.

The RSA Design Directions Awards also contain 14 other categories and it is the premier competition for socially responsible design, encouraging younger designers to 'engage with the broader social and environmental context of society'. The competition allows Royal Mail to keep in touch with the voice of these youngsters, encouraging them to input into the stamp design process.

The brief this year was to 'design a set of stamps that responds to the appeal for a more contemporary, forward looking approach in stamp subject and design'. Unusually for this competition, the choice of subject was left open: it could be global or national, specific or general; it could have a purpose or mark a current/topical event or interest. The key was to make the stamps appeal to a new and younger audience than perhaps is currently the case.

Rising to the challenge, the designers produced an imaginative and varied response with themes ranging from a celebration of youth dance to raising awareness of the risks of testicular cancer

among 20-30 year old men. My favourite set was one showing environmental risks and animals in danger, such as the elephant. These designs incorporated the computer message boxes that pop-up on our screens, such as the choice to "save" or "delete". It was a clever concept, without being *too* clever and fully met the brief of appealing to the young.

The exhibition was the culmination of all the hard work put in by the entrants and was intended to celebrate the work of the six student designers on the short-list. Examples of some of the other entries that did not make the short-list were also on view and it was at a private viewing on the Tuesday evening that the winners for 2004/05 were announced:

- **Jane Trustram** studying at Falmouth College of Arts won the Royal Mail Award Travel Award of £2500 and De La Rue Security Print Travel Award of £900. Jane designed a high impact awareness campaign to help find missing persons, which, through stamps, would reach all corners of the earth.
- **Kelly Dix** also of Falmouth College of Arts won the Internship Award with Pentagram sponsored by Royal Mail worth £1250. Her set of stamps works to promote dance within the youth population, and attract a younger audience to stamp design.
- **Michelle Edwards** from the University of Huddersfield won the Royal Mail Award Travel Award of £2500. Michelle's stamps tell a different child's story, some good, others bad, inspired by the BBC's Children in Need appeal and family childhood stories.
- **Ali Esen** studying at Middlesex University won the Internship Award with Lewis Moberly sponsored by Royal Mail worth £1250. These regional dialect stamps look at the diversity of language within England in terms of changing accents and how regional dialects play a major role in defining people's characters.

As a proof-reader, it was perhaps inevitable that I would be critical of any imperfections in the text accompanying the images. However, some of the students seemed to lack the ability to use words in the intended context, spell correctly or use correct grammar. I wish them well with their CVs and agency ‘pitches’ because however creative they are, it is my belief that their lack of English language skills (or possibly it is simply sloppiness brought about by the email and text age) would put off a prospective employer or agency client. Design is all about attention to detail and communication, and words will forever remain an important and integral part of that creative process.

Putting that gripe aside, the entries on show were of an extremely high standard and worthy of being issued as postage stamps. Some readers may even like some of the designs illustrated here in preference to certain of the recently issued stamps, but as art is such a subjective discipline, then that is fine.

Let’s hope that all of the entrants have fruitful careers in design and that Royal Mail continues to support the arts in this manner for many years to come.

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