

Philatelic Art of Jean-Michel Folon

Synopsis page 1 16 September 2025



TREATMENT AND IMPORTANCE

This five-frame exhibit shows the extensive connection of renowned Belgian artist Jean-Michel Folon (1934–2005) to the philatelic world, through stamps that he designed or which carry images of his art, as well as related cachets and cancellations. As such, it is an experimental exhibit (formerly special study) by combining multiple elements (traditional, FDCs, marcophily, ephemera display, etc.).

Folon's art was used on **41 issues from six countries and the United Nations**, as

well as cachets used for major international events. In addition, he designed the logo for the bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989, which appeared on stamps, cachets and souvenir sheets from **46 countries** (from Andorra to what was then Zaïre), many with multiple stamps.

Due to Folon's significant contribution to international stamp design, this exhibit opens a new window of appreciation for an important (stamp) artist.

The exhibit shows Folon's work basically in **chronological order**. The story *starts* with a book he produced in 1977 with illustrated postcards and envelopes

matched to stamp issues, followed by his first stamp design in 1981, followed by numerous national and international issues. The story *ends* with a special commemorative set issued by his native country Belgium in 2010 after his death. Included as well are more notable first day of issue covers and cachets chosen to highlight his work.

One special advantage of this exhibit is the ability to show relatively contemporary issues in a wider context, drawing together both artistic elements from a famous artist together with philately.

SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE / PERSONAL STUDY

This exhibit is based entirely on personal research, as there is no single source on Folon's postal work or the issues in this exhibit./* I used this research to publish an article on Folon's designs in the March 2024 *American Philatelist*.

Developing this exhibit required research into many country issues to identify Folon designs, as well as dedicated research on Folon's life. I have visited the Folon Foundation outside Brussels, Belgium, the site for the unveiling of the 2010 stamps on "the magic of Folon" shown in the exhibit epilogue. The Foundation contains a room with some of his stamp designs, but it shows only a fraction of what is in my exhibit. I also spoke with the staff and obtained a copy of the contract for the French logo, which provided some important background details.

Folon-specific cancellations are noted in **bold green font**. A marcophily mini-study runs throughout the exhibit, showing cancels with Folon themes. Throughout, I have sought to highlight philatelic knowledge as well as art background in **bold blue font**.

Note /* Years after I started researching and compiling this exhibit, I came across a list on Philatelia.Net of stamps showing Folon's logo for the French revolution. I was happy to see that my list has 20 additional countries. See [Philatelia.Net: French revolution / Artists / Folon Jean-Michel](#) (accessed Sept. 24, 2021 and Nov. 1, 2023). **As noted in the exhibit, additional countries not on that list are marked with an asterisk.**

RARITY / CONDITION

Notable items are marked in **bold red font**. Included is an **original lithograph of Folon's design, signed by the artist**, used on a UN cachet in 1988. There are relatively more colorful FDC covers than usage covers, mainly due to the nature of the issues commemorating the bicentennial of the French revolution as well as Philex 89. Nevertheless, the exhibit includes difficult to find usage – for example, I had multiple correspondence with sources in Vietnam to find an internal use of the French revolution stamp. Special mention must be made of an envelope in the exhibit, **addressed in Folon's handwriting** to his sister living in the United States, bearing a Monaco stamp that Folon himself designed.

Other usage covers shown are likely uncommon, but difficult to quantify. For example, included is a **registered use on cover** of both the 1989 Hungarian souvenir sheet *and* tête bêche issue, mailed from Budapest to Belgium with correct postage. Also, an **envelope from South Korea addressed to Russia, misdirected to and forwarded from Wilmington, DE**, due to the similar postal code! (Surely that is unique...) Throughout, I seek to show items in great condition, as befits Folon's art.

The exhibit includes Belgian and French **photo essays** from the 1980s, several deluxe proofs and "feuillets artistique philatélique" (philatelic artistic sheets). These items were issued in quantities far fewer than the stamps.

Jean-Michel Folon: Postal Artist

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PRESENTATION

This exhibit contains collateral material to reflect Folon's art related to the philatelic material. I highlight repeated stamp motifs, such as Folon's bird designs or the cogwheel design used in Folon's early work, similar to the 1977 Europa design (not by Folon) and later on a 1998 UN stamp on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Folon design). Also included are photographs of the artist at different stages of his life.

In several instances, I identify the engraver of special French proof versions of the stamps as issued. France issued engraved monicolor versions of many issues, showing the engraver's name that does not appear on the final photogravure version. For those, [my presentation shows an arrow pointing to the engraver's name with added info \(including info on the first French woman stamp engraver\)](#).

WHAT'S NOT HERE?

This exhibit contains a few reproductions of items that would not fit in the frame. For example, shown is the reproduced cover of a book on his early philatelic art -- I own the book but do not want to vandalize it by tearing off the cover. Also included is a reproduced and shrunken version of a poster

from the French Postal Museum with a Folon illustration, which I also own but believe is too large in the original for this exhibit. Finally, as noted in the exhibit, I omitted exploitive agency stamp issues that combine Disney characters with French Revolution themes.

FURTHER REFERENCE MATERIALS

A basic biography of Folon is found in English on the Folon Foundation site at <https://fondationfolon.be/artiste-parent/artiste/?lang=en>. The Foundation recognizes his philatelic connection, stating:

"Stamps ... were a matter that the artist was well aware of, because he himself made some of them, notably for the United Nations in 1998, for which he takes up some of the illustrations he had designed for the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man for Europe, for the 5th Olympic Games for the Disabled in 1992, where the symbol of the bird with broken wings is found, or in 1988 [for] the Bicentenary of the French Revolution." (my unofficial EN trans) at <https://fondationfolon.be/words/voyage/?term=1988>

An article in the Chicago Tribune from April 26, 1990, claimed Folon's logo as possibly the most reproduced in French history. (Unfortunately, some time after this exhibit was prepared, the Tribune put the article behind a paywall.) This sounds implausible, except that the image was reprinted in an enormous number of applications (such as the wine labels in the exhibit). One French book on the bicentennial noted the importance of the logo, stating: "[t]he ... multiplication of the 'birds' of Folon ... contributes to give unity to the events ... and thus to make visible to the public the action and presence of the [Bicentennial] Mission. [Bicentenary of the French Revolution - CNRS Éditions \(openedition.org\)](#), at chap. 7 (informal translation). A lengthy 1988 press release (in French) on preparations for the bicentennial is available at [normal.pdf \(centrepompidou.fr\)](#).



Folon shortly before his death
(this image is shown on a postcard in the epilogue
to the exhibit)

Information on French deluxe proofs beginning in 1923 is at [Artist Proofs - Detailed information \(stampproofs.com\)](#). Henry Gintner described Belgian proofs and imperforates in a 2014 price list, calling them "some of the most seldom seen specialized material". That site is no longer available, but the quote is also found in [The Postal History of ICAO](#).

PHILATELIC ART OF JEAN-MICHEL FOLON

Introduction

PURPOSE AND SCOPE: This is an experimental exhibit (sometimes called a special study) that uses numerous types of material to show the philatelic designs of noted 20th century Belgian artist Jean-Michel Folon. His work appears on 41 issues from 6 countries and the United Nations, and a Folon logo commemorating the 1989 Bicentennial of the French Revolution on stamps, cachets, and souvenir sheets from more than 46 countries, from Andorra to Zaire. **RIGHT**, Folon's most famous stamp design.

JEAN-MICHEL FOLON: born in the Belgian commune of Uccle, March 1934. He was a part of the "philatelic world" from near the start of his career in 1967 with "mail art," to after his passing at age 71 in 2005. He is now celebrated at the Fondation Folon outside Brussels.

STRUCTURE: **RED TYPE** marks significant items.

GREEN TYPE marks postmarks or cancellations with Folon motifs (Marcophily).

BLUE TYPE reflects 15 years of research.



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LE MAGAZINE POUR LES PASSIONNÉS DES TIMBRES-POSTE

5-2010 F



LA MAGIE DE FOLON LA FONDATION FOLON A 10 ANS

Organized in CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER , the exhibit concludes with a set of Belgian stamps issued after Folon's death:	3. French Bicentennial logo (1989) 3.1 French 3.2 Other countries 4. Folon Celebrates Outer Space (1991) 5. Folon's Birds (1990 – 1998) 6. International Causes (1998 – 1999) 6.1 United Nations 6.2 European Elections	7. Folon and Monaco (1996 – 2007) 8. Folon and Switzerland (1999 – 2000) 9. Epilogue: The Magic of Folon – Belgium (2010) The magazine cover on this page was issued to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Fondation Folon, corresponding to an issue of 10 stamps showing his art, exhibited in the Epilogue.
1. Early Folon Postal Art (1967 – 1977) 2. Early Folon Postal Designs (1981 – 1988) 2.1 Belgian designs 2.2 French designs 2.3. United Nations Flag Series		

