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WE think

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF WOMEN EXHIBITORS

Don't be discouraged with an exhibit that seems as though it is stuck in a rut. Rethinking and reworking an exhibit may be just what is needed to reinvigorate the exhibit AND the exhibitor. Denise Stotts tells you how she did it.

Growing a Gold

By Denise Stotts

Unlike Liz Hisey, who stated in the last *WE Think* that she started as an exhibitor, not a collector, I was the opposite. In fact, I am still a collector at heart. The exhibiting is an “excuse” to collect more! I was basically dragged, kicking and screaming into exhibiting (yes, I heard the collective gasp).

It all started innocently enough when my husband Jay and I decided to become dealers back in the 1970s. We were going through our accumulations and I kept being drawn back to these “pretty little stamps” from Japan with ladies in kimonos. Jay fi-

nally got tired of me mentioning them and said “why don't you just keep them already!”

Fast forward a few years and it's time for me to step up and put something in the club show. I thought about those pretty Japanese stamps I had stashed away, just because they fascinated me. I got them out and realized there just wasn't enough for an exhibit and certainly no “story line.”

With some research (that's where I morphed from collector to ex-

hibitor) I discovered that these stamps were issued once a year for Philatelic Week in Japan. Fur-



Figure 1. This page shows a variety of elements. Notice the pictorial cancel is “windowed” to show only the stamp and cancel; the beautiful cachet is behind the page since it isn't part of “moving the mail.” [Editor's Note: Enlarge for better viewing by clicking the “+” button on the Adobe Reader toolbar.]

ther research showed that other art was used in this series besides the “beauties” as they are known. The link was that they were all wood block prints from the Edo period of Japan and known as Ukiyo-e – or pictures of the “floating world.” That’s when I really got hooked on studying Japanese art in general and realized that there lots of stamps – even from other countries (!) that showed wood block prints.

“For a good thematic, you will need to study the entire realm of philately.”

I then started collecting covers and other elements that I could find and built a three frame exhibit called “Ukiyo-e” (The judges sure “loved” that!). It did get a silver-bronze at its first WSP showing. I knew it was too small, so I then started gathering other Japanese paintings on stamps, covers, cancels, etc.

The next incarnation was five frames of “Japanese Paintings.” I organized the exhibit by subject matter – thinking to make it more interesting, but heard from some judges that it was confusing. It did get several national silvers and two vermeils. At this point, I decided to mothball it for a while and think about it.

I continued to accumulate material and decided to branch out to all of Japan’s fine arts and arrange the exhibit historically. This allowed for further expansion using sculpture, ceramics, metal work and other mediums.

Eventually, it reappeared in its new form as “Japanese Art” in eight frames and won a GOLD (!!!) at March Party the first time out. It went on to win two more golds and two vermeils at other WSP shows before I again retired it. A very knowledgeable judge (thanks, Janet!) suggested a great last chapter for the exhibit – the influence of Japanese art on Western art – so back to gathering information and material to add another frame. That’s where I am now – it is again a work in progress.

Some advice if you are thinking about doing a thematic exhibit:

First of all – **REALLY, REALLY, REALLY LOVE YOUR SUBJECT!!!** I cannot emphasize this enough – if you don’t truly love it, you will soon begin to tire of it.

Second – **STUDY.** Jay sometimes used to joke that my library of Japanese art books cost more than my collection – I do think they are running about even now, but the library does fill an entire book case. An item does not go into the exhibit based on information given in the philatelic press or catalogs. I verify (and find lots of errors) by finding it in one or more of the books.

Third – **JOIN A SOCIETY** if there is one that deals with your subject. In my case, I have found that the International Society of Japanese Philately has been a great help to me. There was

WE Board of Directors

Ruth Caswell, Chair
ruthandlyman@earthlink.net

Vesma Grinfelds, Secretary
dzvesma@sprintmail.com

Liz Hisey, Treasurer
lizhisey@comcast.net

Patricia Stilwell-Walker, At Large
psw123@comcast.net

Denise Stotts, At Large
stottsjd@swbell.net

Barb Harrison, Newsletter
barbandwill@comcast.net

Janet Klug, Publications
tongajan@aol.com



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**Contact the Editor, Janet Klug
Tongajan@aol.com**

This is a publication of WE – **Women Exhibitors** – Whose mission is to be the vehicle through which women exhibitors can encourage each other through sharing information, ideas, experience, advice, problems, and solutions.

For more information contact Ruth Caswell (Chair) :
ruthandlyman@earthlink.net

“What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?”

VINCENT VAN GOGH

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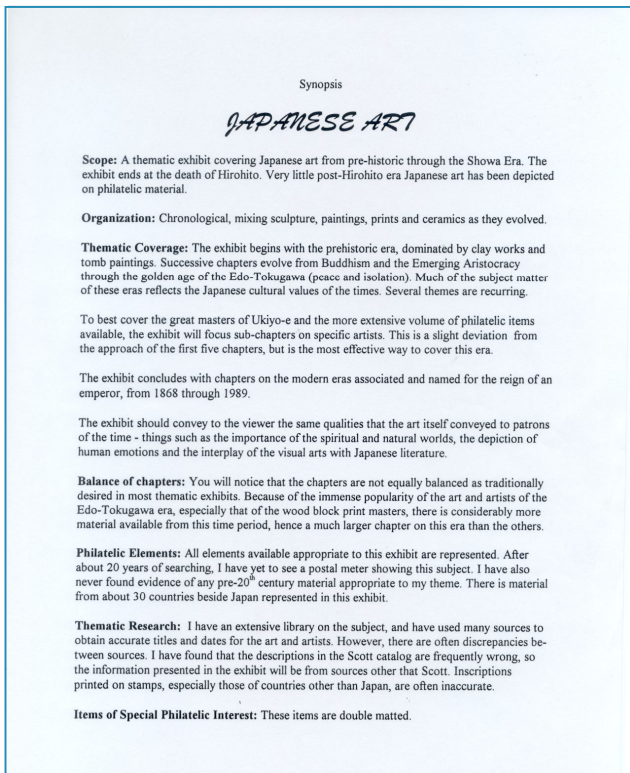


Figure 2. The synopsis page is where you can explain your exhibit to the judges in a way that isn't written in the actual exhibit.

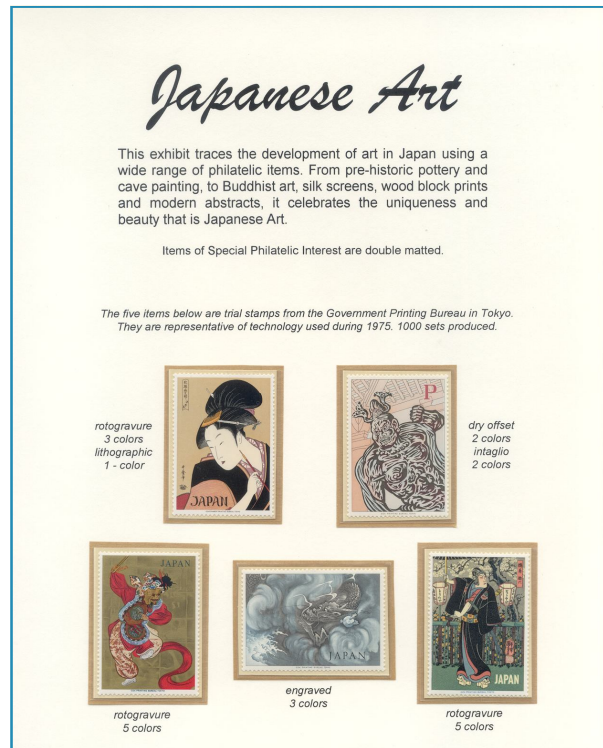


Figure 3. Title Page – keep it brief and to the point. You can show interesting or unusual material that you might not want to put into the exhibit on the title page. I show trial printings produced by the government, but never used for actual stamps.

Japanese Art - Exhibit Plan

	Pages		Pages
1. Prehistoric Era	3	6. The Floating World	44
1.1 Jōmon Period	1/2	6.1 Beauties	12
1.2 Yayoi Period	1/2	6.1.1 Harunobu	
1.3 Kofun Period	2	6.1.2 Kiyonaga	
2. Buddhism	15	6.1.3 Utamaro	
2.1 Asuka Period	2	6.1.4 Eishi	
2.2 Early Nara (Hakuhō) Period	4	6.1.5 Toyokuni	
2.3 Late Nara (Tempyō) Period	9	6.1.6 Hokusai	
3. Emerging Aristocracy	14	6.2 Sumo	2
3.1 Heian Period	4	6.3 Kabuki	5
3.1.1 Religious Art		6.3.1 Sharaku	
3.1.2 Secular Art		6.4 Landscape Masters	23
3.2 Kamakura Period	6	6.4.1 Hokusai	
3.2.1 Religious Art		6.4.2 Hiroshige	
3.2.2 Seeds of Feudalism		6.4.3 Birds & Blossoms	
4. Changing Times	7	6.4.4 Hiroshige III	
4.1 Muromachi Period	4	7. Time of Transition	2
4.2 Momoyama Period	3	8. After Feudalism	34
5. Isolation and Peace	23	8.1 Meiji Era	10
5.1 Early Edo Period	7	8.2 Taisho Era	8
5.1.1 Kanō Art Dynasty		8.3 Showa Era	16
5.1.2 Visitors from the West			
5.1.3 Return to Nationalism			
5.2 Decorative Masters	16		
5.2.1 Sotatsu			
5.2.2 Ogata Korin			
5.2.3 Genre Painting			

Figure 4. Plan Page – required for all thematic exhibits, and a good idea for non-thematics as well. It's nice to put something philatelic on the page if there is room.



Figure 5. Another page showing a variety of elements. Note that the philatelic information is in italics, in order to differentiate it from the thematic text.

"If you think you can or you think you can't, you're right."



Figure 6. This shows a way to show the other side of an item – it is best to copy it in color and at about 75% of the actual size. I also use a different font when showing the titles of the art.

Figure 7. This page is the introduction to a new chapter – also a way to show “philatelic knowledge” by showing the different issuances of the same art.

even a monograph published years ago on the subject of Japanese Art that was a good starting point for me. Also, belonging to the American Topical Association can be helpful as well. There are checklists for some subjects (again, only a starting point, but helpful) and there are lots of study groups within the society.

For a good thematic, you will need to study the entire realm of philately – not only will you need stamps, but those stamps used on cover. This will mean learning about rates and services used on those covers – this is one of the

ways we show philatelic knowledge in a thematic exhibit. You will need to find out if your subject is shown on booklet covers, special cancels, meters, overprints and many other weird little places that things show up. You will want to find archival material for your exhibit – this is where you will really start spending some serious money as a rule. You will need to spend hours looking through unsorted cover boxes for items – bless the few thematic dealers that are out there! (Wish there were more!)

A good plan is a must for a thematic – it should be logical and well balanced. A pitfall some beginning thematic exhibitors fall into is using philatelic terms for chapter titles (for example, “dogs on meters”) – your chapters should always be strictly related to your subject and arranged to follow your story. In my case, balance is an issue because the great majority of Japanese art shown philatelically is from the Edo era, hence that chapter is much larger than others. I deal with this in the synopsis.

“I am not judged by the number of times I fail, but by the number of times I succeed: and the number of times I succeed is in direct proportion to the number of times I fail and keep trying.”



Figure 8. It's okay to overlap items in order to get more on a page – most good thematic tend to look cluttered to people not used to seeing them.

The synopsis – I truly believe that this can change a medal level. If you have a subject with a self-limiting aspect, as I do (there are no items from the 19th century available), it is crucial that you address this in the synopsis and explain why there won't be items from a certain area. I also mention that there will be no Japanese archival material (I do have a couple items from other countries) because it is closely held by

the government and any out in public is illegal.

Regarding my “large” chapter, I explain that the Edo era was the Golden Age for Japanese art, thus explaining that there is much more of it from this period. Most who have attempted a thematic exhibit will admit that it is probably the most difficult, but possibly the most engrossing, type of exhibit one can do. We truly do have a grasp on world-wide philately and usually end up becoming quite educated about our subjects.

Thematic exhibits are a great promoting tool for the hobby – watch people at the frames and they will tend to gather at the thematic and display class exhibits (and we win lots of “most popular” awards! – not that we care about the awards...be honest, we do!)

Got a great exhibiting story?
 Having trouble with an exhibit?
 Have some suggestions for WE?
 Got some creative new ideas?

Write about them!
 Contact the editor:
tongajan@aol.com

“Go out on a limb — that's where the fruit is.”

WILL ROGERS

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WE (Women Exhibitors)



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Open to all, but philately is explored from a woman's point of view.

"The worst thing one can do is not to try, to be aware of what one wants and not to give in to it, to spend years in silent hurt wondering of something could have materialized — and never knowing."

DAVID VISCOTT

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I think...

Can stamp shows benefit by using ideas from the art world?

By Janet Klug

My October 2008 issue of *The Artist's Magazine* arrived a few days ago. One of the letters to the editor was about art competitions. It struck a chord with me, and I wanted to share portions of it with *WE Think* readers.

"We are in the 21st century. I've stopped entering competitions that accept only slides [Ed.'s Note: Some art competitions use slides of works to vet entries for exhibiting at shows; others do all of the judging from slides of artwork].

"The bottom line for me is that slides are Byzantine, and jurors need to get with the program if they want my \$35 or \$40 entry fee.

"...Anyone who has entered a competition more than once probably knows there are personal issues in the judging process. After all, jurors are human, and we can only hope they are looking at composition, value, temperature and that spark that says, 'I'm alive.' That said, the most useful rejection I've received was a Xeroxed slip with about four reasons for rejection and a place for a check mark. I believe this simple gesture — checking a box — does more to help a serious artist get on track than the so-called critiques found in art classes, local art associations, workshops, etc."

So how does all of this relate to

stamp exhibits? As the writer has said, we ARE in the 21st century. Is there a place for philatelic exhibits that are scanned and sent to judges on CD-ROM disks? How much longer can judges afford to travel across country, stay three nights in an expensive hotel, and feed themselves on the \$300 honorarium?

Can we have stamp exhibits online for everyone to see; not just the people who attend the show? Of course we can. [Exponet](http://www.japhila.cz/hof/) (<http://www.japhila.cz/hof/>) is already doing it. Many other societies have online exhibits that can be viewed and read at one's leisure. It can be done, but can exhibits be judged effectively by viewing scans on a disk or website?

As for the second part of the letter to the editor, replace the stated criteria of composition, value, temperature and spark with philatelic criteria of treatment and significance (importance), condition and rarity, knowledge and personal study, and presentation. Now follow through to what the writer was saying about the value of a simple worksheet that provided feedback for the exhibit.

Currently some of our philatelic exhibits receive sheets with numerical scores. If you find a generous judge, there are sometimes written comments to go along with the numbers.

Soon all exhibits will be judged using standard unified criteria (as mentioned above) and judges will be required to provide written comments for every exhibit, but not numerical scores.

I think providing useful written feedback to exhibitors is an idea whose time has come, and I'm pleased this will happen soon. Could the process be made more efficient by accepting scanned exhibits and having some of the judging done off site?

Would stamp shows benefit by needing fewer frames? Would exhibitors benefit by having judges who could view exhibits at home, sitting in a comfortable chair, with more time to devote to reading the exhibit? Would show goers benefit by being able to purchase CDs containing their favorite exhibits, or review the exhibits from their home computer?

What do YOU think?

Send your comments, suggestions and opinions to the editor:

Janet Klug
6854 Newtonsville Road
Pleasant Plain, OH 45162
USA
E-mail: tongajan@aol.com

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"You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you don't try."

BEVERLY SILLS

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