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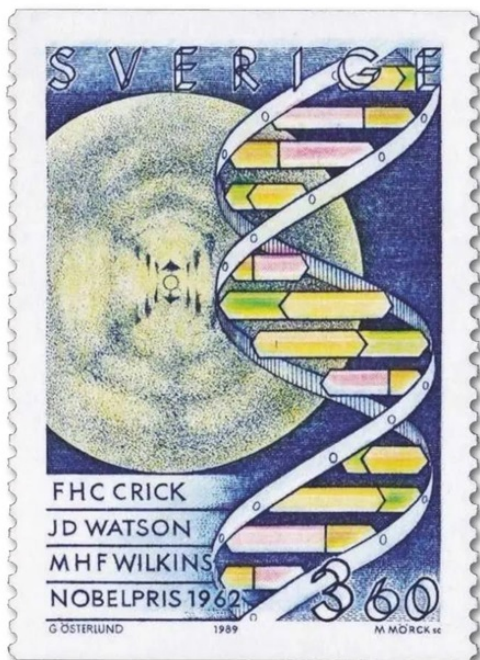


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SOAPBOX

Are these the most intrinsically valuable stamps ever produced? A long series from Liechtenstein have gemstones embedded in them, and are priced accordingly

Postal authorities around the globe are increasingly edging their 'philatelic' output into high-end collectables markets.

An interesting insight into the way this is developing are the limited-edition Gemstones of Philately series from Liechtenstein, which might just be the world's most extravagant stamps to date.

PREMIUM PRODUCTS

Issued by the postal authority in collaboration with Hermann Sieger, each stamp in this series is dedicated to a different precious or semi-precious stone.

Each has a loosely related design but, more importantly, a small piece of the relevant mineral embedded within it.

These stamps are not available from post offices but by subscription only, with print-runs limited to just 500 each and each mint example presented in a plastic capsule box.

The earliest issues have nominal face values of 55c, later ones of €1.50 or most recently €1.80. But the retail prices are very different, and vary according to the value of the embedded stone. They start at €14.85 (about £13) and are typically around €20 (£17.50), although the diamond stamp was priced €69.90 (around £61).

Aesthetically, each stamp is a miniature work of art, in terms of concept and design.

A limited number of first-day covers have also been produced.



ABOVE: The emerald stamp from Gemstones of Philately series 1, illustrating the birth of Christ



ABOVE: The gold ore stamp from Gemstones of Philately series 2, illustrating miners prospecting for nuggets

PRECIOUS GEMS

Six series of 12 have been completed, and the seventh series is ongoing, with new issues appearing at near-monthly intervals.

Series 1, issued from 2016–2018, featured emerald, ruby, amethyst, sapphire, jade, turquoise, lapis lazuli, diamond, coral, tiger eye, citrine and tourmaline.

Series 2, issued in 2018, featured malachite, hematite, amber, pink opal, moonstone, garnet, peridot, topaz, chalcedony, aventurin, gold ore and onyx.

Series 3, issued from 2018–2019, featured fire opal, smoky quartz, aquamarine, chrysoprase, cacholong, rose quartz, apatite, indian moonstone, cordierite, chrysoprase, rock crystal and silice.

Series 4, issued from 2019–20, featured larimar, amazonite, rhodochrosite, pyrite, epidote, dalmatian jasper, charoite, yellow jasper, mookaite,

green agate, tanzanite and kyanite.

Series 5, issued from 2020–2021, featured obsidian, rhodolite, chrysocolla, rhodonite, mahogany obsidian, slate pyrite, opal, sunstone, botswana agate, sodalite, mother-of-pearl and angelite.

Series 6, issued in 2021, featured lepidolith, septarian nodule, carnelian, prehnite, magnesite, zircon, chromian-diopside, serpentine, opalite, seraphinite, dendrolite and ruby-in-zoisite.

Series 7, launched in 2021–23, includes hessonite, hawkseye, moss agate, rhyolite, calcite and blue quartz.

HEAVY METALS

Produced alongside the Gemstones series has been the similar but more loosely planned Minerals & Metals series.

Since 2018, a total of 12 stamps and one miniature sheet have been produced, with subjects including 14-carat gold, gold bar, platinum, silver, sterling silver, silver bar, pearl, amber, rhinestone pearl and titanium.

A mini-series of three titanium stamps commemorated the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11 and the first Moon landings.

Prices have ranged from €9.90 (about £8.60), for the rhinestone pearl stamp, to €98.50 (about £86) for the gold bar stamp.

Indraneil Das & Genevieve V A Gee



ABOVE: The smoky quartz stamp from Gemstones of Philately series 3, illustrating an erupting volcano



ABOVE: The larimar stamp from Gemstones of Philately series 4, illustrating a cocktail drink