

The International Year of the Book, 1972

By Bruce L. Johnson

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the International Year of the Book (IYB, also known as International Book Year), a worldwide initiative organized by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Children's Organization). It was an unprecedented effort that was often placed under the patronage of heads of state or prime ministers, and linked to some major national event in that year, such as a book or libraries week, a national book fair or festival. I'd never taken much notice of the event until recently, and the impetus requires a brief introduction.

My personal collection of stamps on graphics philately recently reached a milestone when I added the 4,500th record on the topic to my computerized database. I built the database during many years of searching, first by painstakingly checking each page of the multi-volume *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue* for appropriate stamps, then incorporating items found on other lists of stamps about books, printing, and ancillary topics (including several sources available from the American Topical Association and, of course, the 3rd edition of *Printing on Stamps* published by the GPA); with the milestone I was heartened to realize that I'd probably never run out of material to collect on my favorite philatelic topic! Keeping order to these records (not to mention the stamps, FDCs, souvenir sheets,

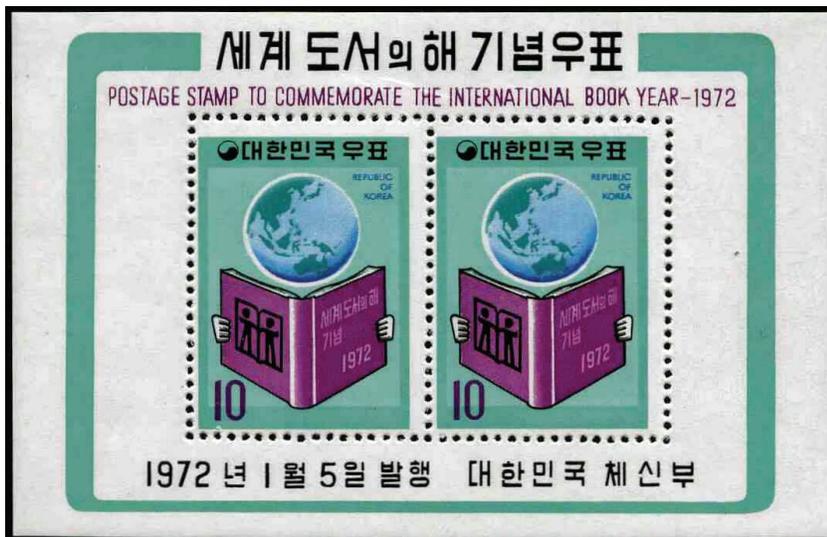
etc. themselves), however, presented a challenge.

To organize my collection of stamps and related material on graphics philately, I developed 21 categories ranging from "Primitive Records" to "Book Fairs and Exhibitions." One category, "The Book as Symbol & Motif," was suggested several years ago by my friend, Martha Jane Zachert, a retired librarian and former GPA board member. When I discovered that I had placed more stamps into this single category than any other, I was concerned that it was becoming a catch-all, a default category for issues that didn't fit any-

where else. I haven't totally resolved that concern, but I was motivated to examine more closely the issues I had placed in that category.

Stamps in "The Book as Symbol and Motif" category include issues that mark political movements, promote literacy and the freedom to read, and commemorate other national and international movements that rely upon graphic communications for their success. As I examined the stamps in this category, I noticed that many featured a similar motif, reproduced below—stylized facing pages of an open book with human silhouette figures superimposed on both. I soon recalled that these stamps were issued in 1972 in observance of the IYB, and that's why I'd like to share with you some information about that ground-breaking event.

UNESCO sponsored the IYB in an effort to promote books and reading throughout the



South Korea Sc808a, a 1972 IYB souvenir sheet

world. In April 1971, international professional organizations that included authors, publishers, and librarians set up a Support Committee for the IYB, whose task was to stimulate and coordinate initiatives in the various sectors of the book community. One of their first joint endeavors was to draft a *Charter of the Book*, the text of which was approved in Brussels at the first meeting of the Support Committee on 22 October 1971. This Charter sets out ten guiding principles for the treatment of books both nationally and internationally¹.

In 1972, many member countries and NGOs of the book world participated in the IYB, and almost 40 countries issued special commemorative postage stamps, many incorporating the symbol for the IYB. The symbol was the work of Michel Olyff, a Belgian graphic designer whose collaboration had been sought by UNESCO at the recommendation of the International Council of Graphic



Michel Olyff's design for the IYB postage stamps

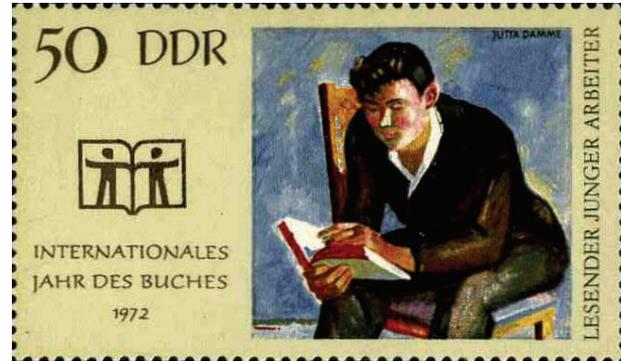
Design Associations (ICOGRADA). The symbol, representing two figures linking arms within the covers of a book, was also widely reproduced on posters, book

jackets, letterheads, mastheads, postage metered stamps, lapel badges, tie pins, cigarette packets, and even as a motif on fabrics used to manufacture dresses, presumably not *haute couture*.

Numerous other events marked the International Year of the Book—new laws on the development of public libraries, research projects on books for children and typography, the creation of literary prizes and special awards for translation, symposia on the problems of local book production and distribution, and the efforts to promote the role of books as instruments of mutual aid and understanding. Stamp designers for the countries that issued IYB commemorative stamps incorporated elements into their designs to

represent these events, most often (but not always) in addition to using the motif designed by Olyff. Reproduced below are three additional examples using Olyff's design.

Most observers knew from the outset that a



German Democratic Republic Sc1393



Algeria Sc477

Morocco Sc252

single year could not possibly suffice to solve the significant difficulties that faced both developed and developing countries in implementing the “Books for All” slogan of the IYB. Thus many of the activities that were planned and set in motion within its framework were conceived with a long-term perspective. Progress has been made, but, after 35 years, we must unfortunately conclude that much work yet needs to be done.

Even with the advent of the computer age, online book stores, the e-book, and other digital sources of information, printed books play a unique role in the effort to provide full and equal opportunities for education to all, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas. Although the stamps issued to commemorate the International Year of the Book in 1972 did little to re-

solve the issues associated with providing "Books to All," they still serve as a visual reminder of an important international initiative to incorporate the ideals included in the *Charter of the Book* into the on-going work of governmental, non-governmental, and professional organizations throughout the world.

¹The Charter of the Book

1. Everyone has the right to read.
2. Books are essential to education.
3. Society has a special obligation to establish the conditions in which authors can exercise their creative roles.
4. A sound publishing industry is essential to national development.
5. Book manufacturing facilities are necessary to the development of publishing.
6. Booksellers provide a fundamental service as

a link between publishers and the reading public.

7. Libraries are national resources for the transfer of information and knowledge, for the enjoyment of wisdom and beauty.
8. Documentation serves books by preserving and making available essential background material.
9. The free flow of books between countries is an essential supplement to national supplies and promotes international understanding.
10. Books serve international understanding and peaceful cooperation.

The full text for each article is given in *UNESCO Bulletin for Libraries*, Volume 6, No. 25 (September-October 1972), pages 238-240.