

## **The fascination of stamp collecting, especially in thematic philately**

by Jos Wolff, RDP

What is so fascinating in stamp collecting, and where lies its real value ? On one side the urge to collect is inherent to many people. On the other side, the smallness of the collectible, its artistic perfection, the fact that stamps are historical monuments, even if made of very ephemeral material, make them so attractive. That they often come from far away countries, sometimes travelling over the oceans and that they are easy to obtain and not too expensive, are more reasons for their attractiveness. The value of stampcollecting is not only a material one, but it is also of educational and ethical nature. Collecting and studying stamps stimulate our wish to research, sharpen our power of judgment and of discernment, and that gives us the possibility to recognize the value of a collection. Further advantages of aesthetical and ethical nature are linked to the collection and study of stamps as an increase of our sense of beauty, the refinement of our taste.

As the philatelists like to think of themselves as a worldwide family, we should not wonder that they sometimes adopt the stamps of foreign countries as if they were their own children. We should not forget that the stamp is an open window towards the world, especially in thematic philately. A new world opens to the philatelist, here he can develop his personality. All philatelic elements that are at his disposal are arranged following a plan, to illustrate a chosen subject. Thematic philately focuses on the illustration of the stamp. This asks for an increased and very detailed study of the subject, with logical subdivisions, that often show a personal view. Further, the development of the chosen subject leads back to philately, as the collector finds out that he needs all philatelic elements to emphasize the leading idea. The world of philately is now widely open for him, an old or classic stamp and/or item finds its place next to new issues. All fields of human activity, of science, history and arts can be developed in thematic exhibits, enriching thus the human culture. Like fireworks showing wonderful colours in the sky, the thematic philately surpasses the usual cultural standards.

This could be noticed at the seminars for thematic philately that were recently organized in the interest of all federations, commissions and collectors. All participants saw once more that our hobby is part of the culture of every country, and is a very sensible way of spending leisure time. One of the most important aspects is that philatelists make friends in all continents, with collectors of all nations, races, religions and opinions, and that connections to other hobbies of our society are developed. FIP would like to cooperate with the national and continental federations to organize as many conferences and seminars as possible, in all classes of philately, to give experienced philatelists the opportunity to pass on their knowledge to the next generation.

At the ITALIA 2009, that took place in Rome in last October, we could once more feel the fascination of the world of philately. Philatelists of the whole world met here and enjoyed visiting this outstandingly well organized exhibition, admiring the exhibits and meeting old friends.

At the end of this year I would like to thank all who have supported philately and FIP during 2009 and I wish all readers a successful and peaceful philatelic year 2010 !