

The Best Way to Own a Cat

This thematic exhibit is both an invitation and a tribute. It is an invitation to my inner world through a subset of my cat collection of postage stamps. In the process of selecting the items suitable for inclusion, I reflected on the importance of keeping cats as pets and keeping a philatelic collection. I realized that a fundamental contribution of both is that of *company*, and that is when this exhibit asked to be turned into a tribute. I was struck by the universality of people's emotional needs, across times and communities and more so by the fact that both cat ownership and stamp collecting are surprisingly affordable and practical ways to satisfy those needs, with the latter having a crucial advantage explained in the section "Feline Therapy".

This two-frame display is the result of years of collecting personal memories of happy and difficult times, art in the form of paintings, poems and literary passages, cultural, historical, and scientific facts on the topic of cats, followed by months of pairing each of those elements with stamps from my cat collection. A collection that began when, as a toddler, my curiosity for the crinkly sound of a mysterious book was rewarded with an easy-to-replace, cancelled-to-order cat stamp. It was hard work to find the right words to express the significance of my findings and properly share the awe that I felt when I discovered them. These efforts yielded a story I hope will prove enjoyable as well as informative.

The philatelic material presented is recent, starting with the Japan *Otoshidama (New Year's Gift) Cat*, 1958, and concluding with the Germany *Haustiere (Pets)*, 2023.

I want to include a word about the choice of the stamps. Personal meaning was the principal characteristic taken into consideration. I am delighted to prominently feature frequently overlooked and very common stamps to illustrate that cats populate the language of everyday life, are the perfect companion of an avid correspondent and philatelist, have been part of the World's Postal History (keep your eyes open for a Belgian corps of "post cats"), and have been a source of inspiration for fruitful minds like that of Isaac Newton (cats, as you will learn, inspired one of his lesser-known inventions). This range of cat-themed stamps illustrates how cats gifted self-awareness, wit, and reflection to writers like Edward Lear, Dr. Seuss, and Jorge Luis Borges. I was equally happy when I encountered a rare 1977 local post Kaulbach Island "Alice in Wonderland" block, to illustrate the odd lessons that Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat teaches us. Structuring the exhibit in this way allowed me to elevate and honor both the recreation of stamp collecting and my life experiences. Importantly, I realized that a collection does not need to be expensive or rare to be meaningful, rewarding, instructive, and indeed *valuable* for the collector.

As this story unfolds, you will find proof that, despite their aloof reputation, cats are capable of tremendous loyalty and tenderness, like that of the one belonging to Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton (not to mention her surprising secret agent skills). To reiterate, one of the rewards of cat ownership is the comfort of their company and my greatest realization in preparing this exhibit was that such *cat company* can be conveyed through *cat postage stamps*. It is immensely reassuring to see that **postage stamps are the best way to own a cat** when one is faced with difficult situations where a real cat is simply not an option. This being the case, I wish to offer this exhibit as a tribute to breast cancer survivors, like my grandmother, who was able to own her cat in "the best way", by keeping it in an album as company at the hospital and while convalescing, where a real cat would have been cumbersome and potentially unsafe. To this end, the section "Feline Therapy" features a rich over 25 countries selection of Breast Cancer Awareness postage stamps. Highlighted are the several elements of the omnibus issue based on the 1998 USPS "Fund the Fight, Find a Cure" semi postal. My hope is that viewers will share the joy of my realizations and perhaps, too, decide to own a cat in "the best way".

Plan of the Exhibit, selected items

1. **My Life with Cats**, *The Gambia, Naughty Puss!*, 1994
2. **Our New World**, *Deutschland, Für uns Kinder, For us Children*, 2001
3. **Cats in Literature**, *Kaulbach Island, Alice in Wonderland*, 1977
4. **Cats and Correspondence**, *Great Britain, Orlando the Cat*, 1994
5. **Cats in World Postal History**, *Hrvatska, Dječji Svijet, Children's World*, 2018
6. **How to Address a Cat**, *United States, T.S. Eliot FDC*, 1986
7. **Cats and Mail across Generations**, *France, Garfield Sourires, Smiles*, 2008
8. **Cats in Everyday Language**, *Great Britain, Weather*, 2001
9. **Notable Cats of Notable People**, *Rep. de Guinea Ecuatorial, Gatos, Cats*, 1978
10. **Cats vs dogs, an Eternal Struggle**, *United States, American Art*, 1998
11. **Cats as Symbols**, *Japan Otoshidama Cat*, 1958
12. **Feline Therapy**, *United States, Breast Cancer semi postal*, 1998
13. **A Perfect Companion**, *Nederland, Kinderpostzegelaktie, Children's campaign*, 1982
14. **Cats and Yarn**, *Deutschland, Haustierte (Pets)*, 2023
15. **Cats Communication Skills**, *France, Croix Rouge, Saisons, Seasons 1975*
16. **Epilogue**, *Mongolia, Cats*, 1991