

Commemorative Stamp: Background and the Design Perspective



“ As the University of Moratuwa reached its 50th anniversary in 2022, commemorating five decades of exceptional contributions to Sri Lanka’s higher education, Mr. Niroshana Peiris a Social Philatelist (Stamp researcher and feature writer) revealed a significant fact - the absence of the University’s presence in Sri Lanka’s Philatelic arena. To mark this milestone and honour the institution’s groundbreaking academic excellence of 50 years, the idea of a commemorative stamp for its Golden Jubilee Celebration emerged. ”

A postage stamp symbolises a nation's value, consisting of physical and symbolic dimensions. Physically, it encompasses the paper, design, inscriptions, ink, gum, perforation etc. Designing such a small yet democratic symbol holds immense significance as each line, shape, colour, and texture carries profound symbolic meanings. This fiscal device has only a three-second window to communicate between the user and the envelope it is affixed (Zsolt, 2012). Discussions on the 'Science of Designing Stamps' initiated in 2020 between the Department of Integrated Design, University of Moratuwa, and the Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka. These laid the groundwork as the Department spoke about the scientific nature of designing stamps and proposed thirty (stamp) sample designs and themes, emphasising that stamps are not just affixed prints but national symbols, landmarks of history and revenue generators completed for its users. In addition to this discussion a stamp design competition was launched in 2020, inviting Media and Communication Design undergraduates who were endangered in this conversation via their project; Graphic and Layout Design to partake. The winning design, created by Ms. Amaya Rodrigo, was launched to mark 2020.02.20, 20:20:20 stamp. Continuing in this vein, a stamp competition was initiated for the University's 50th Commemorative stamp, calling upon present and past graduates to design an innovative stamp reflective of the institution's journey towards excellence.

The criteria required a design that encapsulated the 50th Jubilee theme: University of Moratuwa envisions itself on a journey towards future excellence through collaborative and multidisciplinary research and innovation to "Build the Nation", accompanied by a logo representing 50 years. Despite receiving numerous submissions by the deadline, most fell short of expectations,

often resembling old buildings or lacking a clear vision. However, Ms. Samaudra De Silva's stamp stood out due to its clear composition. Adhering to the competition selection criteria and the clause 'for the submitter of the selected design to collaborate with a Design Team to achieve the design's full potential,' a team was formed within the Department of Integrated Design under my supervision, together with Ms. De Silva. A novel concept was developed to transcend traditional constraints. The revised concept comprised four key components. The first highlighted the institution's humble origins, symbolised by the depiction of the University's inaugural building—the Sumanadasa Building. The second element emphasised the significance of graduates—the fundamental purpose behind the institution's establishment. The third component incorporated a series of icons representing the institution's vision. Finally, the fourth element encapsulated the significance of the commemorative stamp through the use of a logo and the University emblem.

To achieve a meaningful composition, specific design decisions were taken within each of the elements towards the completion of the Commemorative Stamp:

Element one: The Sumanadasa building is placed as the first element in the stamp to adhere to the traditional reading practice in Sri Lanka, from left to right. This placement symbolises the commencement of the University's chronological journey. The chosen illustration style offers a modern interpretation, resembling an initial pen sketch to capture authenticity. This illustration style is unconventional in Sri Lankan Philatelic practices but can be observed elsewhere (Figure 01). This choice reflects the institution's boldness and distinctive character. The intentional perspective of

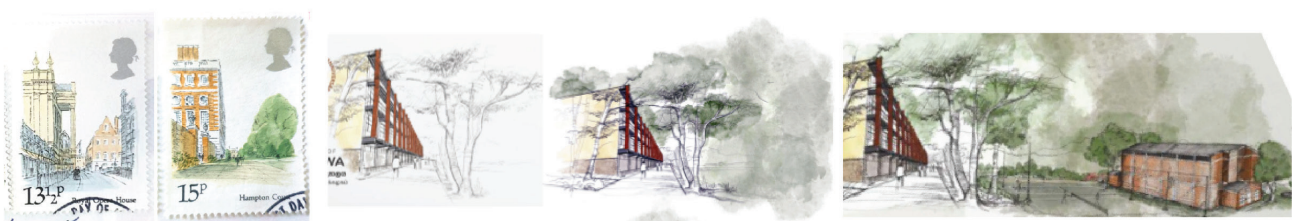


Fig. 01: Great Britain 1980 London Landmarks stamp series and the progressive development of the Building

the building, guided by a vanishing point, leads the viewer into the stamp. The placement of this element within the overall composition serves a dual purpose: guiding the reader from left to right for seamless reading and creating a visual pathway that reduces visual clutter by drawing attention from front to back. The strategic use of colour emphasises the building's substantial presence in a diffuse background. The illustration was crafted by Mr. Aruna Welagedara, Department of Landscape Architecture.

Element two: The placement of Graduates follows the Sumanadasa building, signifying the transition from past to present. Initial attempts involved employing contemporary graphics such as silhouettes, gradient colour schemes, and modern styles (Figure 02). However, these attempts clashed with the illustration style used in element one, causing a disruptive contrast that hindered the visual flow. User testing validated this ineffectiveness. To ensure consistency in illustration styles, the decision



Fig. 02: Visualising Graduates, experimentation on illustration styles and overall composition

was made to portray the graduates realistically as watercolour drawings. Moreover, watercolour was seamlessly applied to merge with the pen sketch used in element one. The graduate illustration emphasises local attire such as sarees, cloaks, and garlands while omitting graduation caps. Specific details such as facial features, hairstyles, attire colours, and the arrangement of male and female figures were meticulously finalised. These graduates symbolise Architecture and Engineering graduates, distinguished by their attire, marking the pioneering academic degrees of the University of Moratuwa. Positioned strategically to grab attention, their faces and glances are directed toward the readers. Further, when this illustration is reduced to its actual size, the cloaks appear as a blob of black, making them the focal point in the visual hierarchy (Figure 04). Multiple illustration attempts were made by Ms. Samudra De Silva and Mr. Thanushan. The final graduate illustration was completed by Ms. Erangi Senavirathne, Department of Integrated Design.



Fig. 03: The compositions, experimentation on illustration styles and overall composition

Element three: Initially, the concept did not incorporate icons due to the intricate details within them, making their inclusion impractical. However, a comment from a non-designer at the philatelic bureau led to their subsequent inclusion. To maintain the visual flow, the most simplified and relevant icons representing the university's academic specialties were selected. These icons were illustrated using modern graphics that reflect contemporary trends in user interface design. Positioned as a watermark in the background, the icons were framed resembling buttons, symbolising the technological significance of the University. Notably, the frames on the far corners were left incomplete, symbolising a larger collection of icons spanning all departments and divisions within the University. All these icons were designed for the Commemorative Publication by Mr. Sudeep...

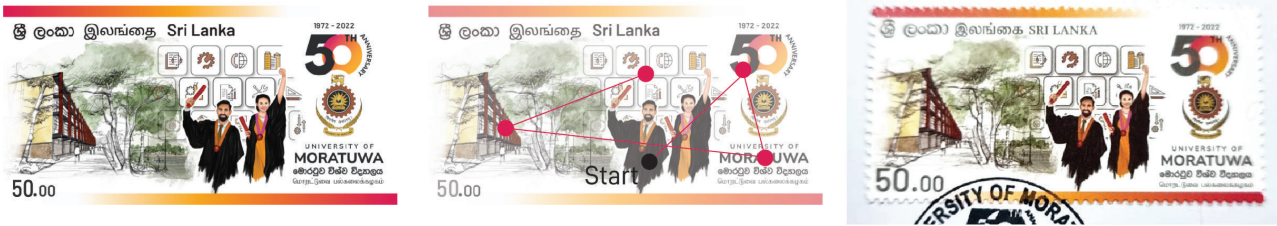


Fig.04: The completed artwork, The visual hierarchy, The Original Commemorative Stamp

Element four: Incorporating the significance of commemorative stamps through a logo is customary; however, previous local philatelic stamps displayed both a logo and the University emblem, creating visual congestion in a limited space. To overcome this challenge, it was decided to merge the 50th Jubilee logo and the University Emblem into one cohesive composition. This unique approach diverges from the traditional practices observed in Sri Lanka, employing modern graphic styles. A sans-serif font was deliberately chosen to ensure clarity, while the deliberate use of ample white space distinguishes it from the visually heavier elements. Multiple iterations were undertaken and finalised by Ms. Samudra De Silva.

Overall Composition, Finishing, and Launch Kit: Each of these elements plays a significant symbolic role, yet to create a cohesive

unit, a gradient colour border was strategically positioned at the top and bottom. The colour scheme chosen for the borders aligns uniquely with the University's branding, yet is distinct to the 50th Jubilee event. A touch of yellow was used to symbolise the colour Gold and the incorporation of warm crimson was used to frame and draw attention to this distinctive piece. These contrasting borders, directed in opposite directions, engage the reader towards the stamp.

Alongside the stamp, a first-day cover, docket, and a special cancellation mark were designed. To ensure the stamp's prominence, the first-day cover was created with a simplistic background, keeping the focus on the celebrated icon—Stamp of the launch. Placing the stamp against this minimalistic background aimed to capture the necessary attention required for a visually heavy

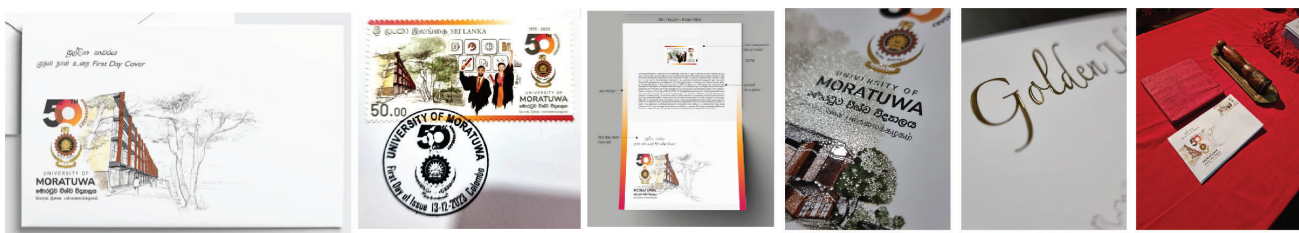


Fig.05: First day cover, Cancellation seal, Docket and Print Finish

piece. The docket, designed to accommodate standard stamp collectors' pouches, features a simple design with a die-cut to hold the cover. The docket was elegantly finished with gold foiling and UV embossing, meticulously crafted by the selected printer. This print earned recognition at the Global Print Awards 2023, an accolade presented by PrintCare (PVT) Ltd.

The Golden Jubilee stamp, commemorating 50 years of excellence at the University of Moratuwa, stands as a modest yet pioneering visual design crafted by a team for Sri Lanka's philatelic production. The postal issue was launched on December 13, 2023, during a modest ceremony at the Postal Head Office. The Postmaster General, Mr. Ruwan Sathkumara, presented the first-day cover to The Vice Chancellor, Prof. D.P. Chandarasekara. Additionally, the stamp will be showcased at the National Postal Museum and made available for purchase through the Philatelic Bureau of Sri Lanka.