

## FrameWork 7/14

### Kunstverein Toronto (Kari Cwynar and Kara Hamilton) on *Magenta wants to push physical reality to its leaky margins*

#### *The 1c Magenta*

On Tuesday June 17, 2014, the 1856 British Guiana 1c Magenta sold at auction in New York for \$9.5 million. It is regarded by many philatelists as the world's most famous stamp. Issued in limited numbers in British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1856, only one specimen is now known to exist. The world of collectors has been desperate to see the 1c Magenta for decades; it has not been on public view since 1986 and is the only major stamp absent from the British Royal Family's private Royal Philatelic Collection.

Measuring 1 inch-by-1 1/4 inches, the stamp is imperforate, printed in black on magenta paper. The colour's presence is indescribable; it has no root in the philatelists' world. A sailing ship along with the colony's Latin motto 'we give and expect in return' in the middle, now only just visible. Four thin lines frame the ship. The stamp's country of issue and value in small black upper case lettering in turn surround the frame. The postmaster's signature can be seen on the left hand side, along with a heavy postmark. The only remaining specimen is in used condition; its paper has been cut in an unusual octagonal shape and its magenta hue soiled.

This item has broken the world record for single stamp auction price each of the last four times it has been sold. Its issue came about through mischance; the recorded results of happenstance experiment. An anticipated delivery of stamps by ship did not arrive, and so the local postmaster, E.T.E. Dalton, authorized printers Joseph Baum and William Dallas, who were the publishers of the Official Gazette newspaper in Georgetown, to print an emergency issue of three unique stamps. Dalton gave specifications for the design, but the printer chose to add a ship image of his own design to the stamps. Dalton was not pleased with the end result – as a safeguard against forgery he ordered that all correspondence bearing the stamps be autographed by a post office clerk. This particular stamp was initialed E.D.W. by the clerk E.D. Wight.

The 1c Magenta was discovered in 1873 by a 12-year-old Scottish schoolboy, L. Vernon Vaughan, in the Guyanese town of Demerara (whose postmark the stamp bears), amongst his uncle's letters. It was in poor condition, ink-smudged and slightly damaged. Unlike anything else, and without record in his stamp catalogue, Vernon sold it some weeks later for six shillings to a local collector, N.R. McKinnon. In 1878, McKinnon's collection was sold to a Liverpool stamp dealer, Thomas Ridpath, for £120. Shortly afterwards, in the same year, Ridpath sold the 1c Magenta to Philipp von Ferrary for £150. His massive stamp collection was willed to a Berlin museum, but following Ferrary's death in 1917 the entire collection was taken by France as war reparations at the end of World War I. Arthur Hind bought it during a series of fourteen auctions in 1922 for over US\$36,000 (reportedly outbidding three kings, including George V). In the 1920s, a rumour developed that a second copy of the stamp had been discovered and that Hind had quietly purchased this second copy and destroyed it. On October 30, 1935 the 1c Magenta was offered for sale at Harmer Rooke & Co auction 2704, lot 26, where a bid of £7,500 was received from Percival Loines Pemberton. However, the lot was withdrawn and returned to Mrs. Scala (formerly Mrs. Hind). In 1940, she offered it for private sale through the philately department of Macy's department store in New York City. Fred "Poss" Small then purchased the 1c Magenta for \$40,000; Small, an Australian-born engineer from Florida, had wanted to own the stamp since he first heard about it as a boy.

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In 1980, the eccentric multimillionaire philatelist John E. du Pont bought the 1c Magenta for \$935,000, setting the world's record for a single stamp price yet again. Subsequently, the stamp was believed to have been locked in a bank vault while its owner was in prison for murder. DuPont died while still incarcerated on 9 December 2010. The vaulted stamp was last sold from the DuPont estate on June 17, 2014 at a Sotheby's New York auction, taking only two minutes to sell to an anonymous bidder.

It has been suggested that the 1c stamp was merely a "doctored" copy of the magenta 4c stamp of the same series, a stamp very similar to the 1c stamp in appearance. In 1999, another 1c stamp was allegedly discovered in Bremen, Germany. The stamp was owned by Peter Winter, who is widely known for producing forgeries of classic philatelic items, printed as seemingly accurate facsimiles on modern paper. Nevertheless, two European experts, Rolf Roeder and David Feldman, have said Winter's stamp is genuine. The stamp was twice examined and found to be a fake by the Royal Philatelic Society London. In their opinion, this specimen in fact was an altered 4c Magenta stamp.

The text is largely sourced from the Wikipedia entry for the British Guyana 1c Magenta postage stamp:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British\\_Guyana\\_1c\\_magenta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Guyana_1c_magenta)

