

## Moy Announces an American Neo-Renaissance at FIDEM 2007

(by Donald Scarinci)

Just as FIDEM 1959 in Weimar signaled the beginning of modernism in world Art medals and FIDEM 2002 in Paris became the final international acknowledgement that the French dominance in the art of the medal has ended, FIDEM 2007 may come to mark the official beginning of the neo-renaissance of American Coinage design.

Edmund C. Moy, Director of the United States Mint, delivered the keynote address on the opening day of the conference and most delegates and participants talked about it throughout the week. It was a powerful speech emphasizing the importance of good art and ending with a new call for artists who are United States citizens to offer their talent to the Mint.

Moy said that despite the restraints of Congress on individual coin and medal designs, "I want to spark a new awakening of excellence in coin design, and embody the American spirit in new and renewed allegorical or iconic symbolism."

He acknowledged that the bar set by St. Gaudens, Brenner, Weinman and others was very high, but he announced a new call for the most talented artists in America to help surpass that bar.

"By assembling the right talent, providing the right inspiration, communicating American values and evoking the American spirit, we can spur a neo-renaissance in American coin design," he said.

The Director talked about his own Mint Directors' Medal, one of the continuous and unbroken series of U.S. Mint medals produced since the tenure of the first Director of the Mint. He cited the example of the St. Gauden's liberty design as an example of a work of art that captures the American spirit at the turn of the century. He said that for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, "I would put Lady Liberty on a diet and make

her more muscular as liberty at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a much more muscular and forceful presence in the world."

"And because I serve a president who believes that liberty is God's gift to the world and not just western civilization, I recommended a wardrobe change to a gown that was less Greco Roman and more minimalist," the Director said.

There can be little doubt that something very creative is happening at the United States Mint. Since November 20, 2003, when Henrietta Holsman Fore, then Director of the U.S. Mint, announced her "call for Artists," competition among the artists and acceptance of new things has been building at the Mint.

At Moy's direction, John Marcanti was named to the Chief Engraver position which hasn't been filled since Elizabeth Jones left the U.S. Mint in the 1980's. Marcanti's leadership has, so far, been very successful selecting and encouraging new talent and new thinking about the art of America's coinage designs.

Since Coinage has more congressional restrictions than medals, examine the first two medals in the Moy/Marcanti era:

The reverse of last year's "Byron Nelson" medal was designed by Don Everhart. The use of the circle creates a three dimensional quality. The golf ball sits within the circularity of the medal and the golfer's swing sits within the circularity of the golf ball. If the medal were struck in some relief, correctly patinated and some minor changes made here and there, which the artist does not control, this would be even more remarkable than it is already.



The “Dr. Norman E. Borlaug” Bronze Medal produced this year by Phoebe Hemphill and Don Everhart is another brilliant piece. Dr. Borlaug, a winner of the Nobel peace prize for his work in agriculture, is engulfed in a wheat field from which he emerges and is surrounded with a seemingly infinite horizon. It is the expanded horizon of food that formed Dr. Borlaug’s life work, here beautifully represented by the artist. The reverse again uses the circle within a circle as a nicely drawn set of hands which holds and supports the earth the way Dr. Borlaug’s work with agriculture support the people living on the earth.



Norman Borlaug (2006) Designed by Phoebe Hemphill (obv) and Don Everhart (rev)



Congress legislates coin and award medal topics and designs. They are pretty specific and often mandate the images and wording that must appear leaving very little flexibility to the artists. With an understanding of these restraints, there can be no question that something new and bold is happening at the U.S. Mint.

Even the most skeptical aficionado of American medallic art and coin design could recognize the sharp difference in quality between the products of the last 18 months and the products of the past. A random sampling of examples of U.S. Mint products since 1976 (see below) clearly demonstrates a shift. Whether or not this is a sustained trend is too soon to tell, but Director Moy’s legacy now depends on it.

The FIDEM conference gathered together artists, world mint personnel, scholars and art medal collectors from nineteen countries. The conference is held once every two or three years since 1937. It is the first time this conference was held in the United States since 1937. Moy’s choice of forum to make this speech was as monumental and significant as the speech itself.

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I would like to be clear that the artists in the first three medals cannot be blamed for the lack of artistic merit of the medals. I have chosen the first three medals to illustrate the overall lack of attention and concern by the Mint's leadership to the Congressional medals in sharp contrast to the two latest medals. A side by side comparison of these medals demonstrates visually that something at the U.S. Mint has changed and that Director Moy's speech is not just words that every American wants to hear. The results since Moy has been the Director of the U.S. Mint speak for themselves in a very obvious way when you compare the medals.



*Brigadier General Charles Yeager Bronze Medal (1975) designed by Sherl Winter (obv.) and Matthew Peloso (rev.)*



*Vietnam Veterans National Medal (1984) designed by Matthew Peloso and John Mercanti*

