

This Day in History... September 21, 1924

Birth of Stamp Artist Howard Koslow

Howard Bertram Koslow was born on September 21, 1924, in Brooklyn, New York. Over the course of 40 years, Koslow produced artwork for more than 50 US stamps and postal cards, including the popular and long-running Lighthouse Series.

Koslow attended James Madison High School before studying advertising design at the Pratt Institute. He then apprenticed with a French poster designer and spent a summer at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan and the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan.



This Antarctic Treaty stamp was Koslow's first stamp design.



From a series of stamps honoring the 100th anniversary of America's first national park.

Koslow embarked on a successful career providing graphic art for corporations and book covers. He was also known for his realistic portraits and was committed to ensuring every piece was historically accurate. Koslow provided paintings for the Air Force and Coast Guard, many of which are still on display at the US Air Force Academy and the Pentagon. For NASA, he painted the Apollo 15 mission and the first launch of the space shuttle *Endeavour*. Many of his space paintings are on display at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC and the NASA Art Gallery at Cape Canaveral, Florida.

In 1971, a fellow artist encouraged Koslow to consider designing stamps. He received his first stamp commission that year, for the 8¢ stamp honoring the 10th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty. The following year, he provided the art for the 6¢ stamp showing a concert at Wolf Trap National Park in Virginia. Many of Koslow's early stamps were engraved with limited colors. However, as the USPS moved toward offset lithography, his designs became more natural, often based on photographs.



Koslow's first portrait stamp



Fittingly, Koslow also designed the stamp honoring the 30th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty.

Koslow's original paintings were created on a large scale. But he used a reducing glass to look at them at about one-sixth of their actual size, to see how they would look on small stamps. Daniel Piazza, chief curator of philately at the Smithsonian National Postal Museum, said of Koslow's talent for designing stamps, "There is a real skill to making something readable at one inch square, Howard was very good at that."

Koslow's most beloved stamp images are for the long-running Lighthouse Series. The first stamps, issued in 1990, were intended to be a stand-alone issue, but they proved so popular, they became a series of stamps that lasted over 30 years! According to *Washington Post* stamp and coin columnist Bill McAllister, demand for the stamps "overwhelmed the postal service." And even though stamp sales had generally gone down, "these were stamps that people would look for and ask for... Post offices literally couldn't keep them in stock." Later on the series was compared to the Elvis stamp, which is often considered "the most saved stamp in American history."

Koslow took great pride in his work and believed that just as the letters his stamps were used on told a story, so too should the stamp "tell you something." In addition to illustrating more than 50 US stamps, Koslow provided artwork for even more stamps of the Marshall Islands, which often featured US themes, particularly World War II.

Koslow suffered from Hodgkin's lymphoma and died on January 25, 2016, at his home in Toms River, New Jersey.



Koslow's lighthouse stamps were so popular, they led to a series of stamps that spanned over 30 years.

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316

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