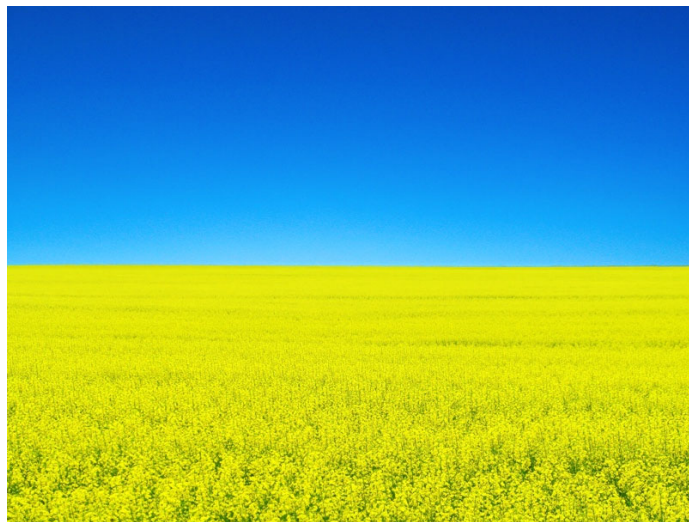


Stamp Out War: Support Ukraine! (2022 Edition)

This article details the genesis of Stamp Out War project and the back-stories behind the creation of a unique collection of maxicards that demonstrates global support for Ukraine.

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. A few days later, I dug through my visual archives looking for a relevant image to use in the call for peace. I came across a photograph which, by accident or by design, echoed the colour scheme of the Ukrainian flag. This combination of colours suddenly caused an unexpected effect for me as a viewer, and recent circumstances gave this work a new meaning that I had not anticipated as a photographer.



War and Peace by Linda: Taken in 2009 in Prince Edward Island, Canada; post-processed and published in 2022.

It was taken in 2009 during my bike tour across Canada. Then freshly arrived in Prince Edward Island after having travelled through the Maritimes, I was in a state of exhaustion when this vast field of yellow flowers spread out in front of me. No cloud or artificial object came to disturb the landscape. This was a moment of relaxation. I composed this very orderly photo with equal parts shared between the sky and the field to show the harmony between the natural elements. When it was taken in 2009, everything seemed to stand still, motionless, which invites meditation, peace, calm, whereas in 2022, this moment of tranquillity contrasts in times of trouble with the madness of war. Two days after the war had started, I named this piece, jarringly, *War and Peace* and published it on the web.

In early March, *War and Peace* was quickly becoming my most viewed photograph on Flickr. I decided to print out some copies of 5×7” postcards to hand out on The Stamp Forum to whoever wanted to show his/her solidarity with Ukraine. Originally, these postcards were the vehicles carrying all sorts of messages and political slogans that the senders wished to convey to the recipients, who might be an acquaintance of the sender or a politician the sender wished to address, like Putin.



War and Peace postcard sent by Linda to the Kremlin using peace-themed stamps.

Up until then, all these efforts sound like a grassroots Mail Art initiative created out of growing political concerns. However, with my philatelic friends from the forum – Dorin (@dorincard) and others – who couldn't just watch what was happening in Europe, I felt the strong urge to do something productive to help the Ukrainians to battle the uncertainty of the war. That's why I started pondering seriously over the possibility of creating philatelically worthy and historically significant maxicards that can be auctioned off to raise funds for Ukraine relief effort.

In those early days of the conflict, I was thinking of using peace-themed stamps cancelled at locations with peace-related names to create a collection of maxicards on the (abstract) theme of peace, yet feared that the visual wouldn't match perfectly with the blue/yellow colour scheme. I also explored the theme of hope, without much satisfaction.

Later in April, I was told by forum member Kevin (@wakeybluenose) that to manifest its support for Ukraine, Croatia would be issuing a special stamp showing a rapeseed field in the backdrop of blue sky that would be both botanical and visual match to my postcard. It turns out that this new Croatian issue was part of the worldwide response by the official postal agency of some countries to Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. Up until summer 2022, these countries are, in order of stamp release: Latvia (10 March), Estonia (24 March), Poland (25 March), Austria (31

March), Croatia (12 April), Moldova (19 April), Lithuania (6 May), Luxembourg (11 May), Spain (29 May), France (23 June) and Canada (7 July). Each of these stamps incorporates into its design the blue and yellow colours of Ukraine's flag more or less prominently.



Ukraine support stamps issued by the 11 countries before mid-August 2022.

I immediately decided to settle on creating a collection of maxicards centered around the theme of Ukraine by making use of these new issues. A global call was subsequently launched to invite people from these 11 countries to show solidarity with Ukraine on Ukraine's national day – the 24th of August – by getting a postmark from a local post office on my postcards showing these Ukraine support stamps. This way, the visual of the card and the stamp are tinted in the blue/yellow colour scheme that represents Ukraine, and the date of the postmark is also related to the country. The location of the postmark matters less in this project, but I have tried to maximise the Ukraine

connection by creating some maxicards in sister cities of the Ukrainian capital. For example, Chişinău (Moldova), Odense (Denmark), Riga (Latvia), Tallinn (Estonia), Warsaw (Poland) and Vilnius (Lithuania) are all twinned with Kyiv.

As this project was gaining momentum on social media, some of my non-philatelist friends around the world expressed their desire to help, even though their countries didn't issue a special Ukraine support stamp in the blue/yellow colour scheme. Not wanting to discourage these kindred souls, I decided to enlarge the scope of this project by acquiring what I later call 'Ukraine tribute stamps' that show sunflower(s) or, in case no species of sunflower is native to the country, yellow flower(s) that can be used to pay tribute to Ukraine. The choice of sunflower and its generalised version is evident for it has long since been regarded as a symbol of Ukraine's agricultural prowess thanks to the country's significant production of sunflower crops, to the point that such a visually striking image of vibrant yellow colour is frequently associated with the country's national emblems and promotional materials.

Meanwhile, I was also working on an original hand-drawn/painted cover (or maxicard, if you insist) that will be donated for the same cause. This piece, named *Peace to Us*, was completed on 20 August and was postmarked on 24 August in Myrnam, AB, whose name means 'peace to us'. An additional first-day-of-issue cancellation that accompanies the release of this semi-postal stamp in Canada was later added onto the cover.

Peace to Us (2022) is an anti-war artwork that uses the sunflower as a symbol of hope, peace, and growth. The flower replaces the bullet in the gun, offering a reminder that something beautiful and fragile can be just as powerful as physical force. The blue and yellow paint splatters, inspired by Ukraine's national flag, represent the blood that has been shed in the ongoing conflict in the country. The composition of the piece is intentionally jarring, with the mechanical gun and dark figure creating a sense of threat and horror. But the natural beauty of the sunflower offers a counterpoint to the violence, reminding us of the potential for new life and growth even in the midst of destruction. By fighting the brutality of war with something delicate and inspiring, *Peace to Us* (2022) encourages us to imagine a world where conflict can be resolved through peaceful means. It is a timely reminder of the urgent need for peace and unity in Ukraine and beyond.



Peace to Us (2022): graphite, charcoal, colour pencil and watercolour on Arches Watercolour Hot Press Paper (300 gsm).

As this project was mobilising public opinion in support of peace, I was overwhelmed by the outpouring of interest from people around the world. From Australia to Austria, from Canada to Croatia, from Japan to Spain, and beyond – people from 25 countries have participated in this project, each adding their country's stamp and postmark to this collection of maxicards that is not only a testament to the power of philately to unite different individuals across borders and cultures, but also a practical demonstration of the impact that can be achieved through collaboration. In times of conflict and division, it is heartening to see the power of philately to bring people together in support of a common cause.

Nevertheless, the road to the creation of a unique and visually stunning collection of maxicards that embody the theme of global solidarity is not short of pitfalls. I must admit that recruiting participants was the toughest part of the project. While it's true that being a quadrilingual allows me to communicate airily with a large number of world habitants, lack of knowledge and general interest in philately / maximaphily / deltiology / marcophily also makes the task of convincing non-collectors the worth of this project tedious. Also, given the small population of some countries whose participation I counted on, it was difficult to find the right person willing to pay a visit to a post office on a summer day. I don't recall how many private messages I sent out were unread, or how many times I felt so dejected that I asked Dorin to connect me with his acquaintances/friends living in particular countries at last minute. The result my global team and I have achieved was impossible without the valuable help of many TSF and Postcrossing forum members.

Despite the challenges, we remain optimistic about the positive impact our collection will have on the world in times of troubles. In the coming months, these unique cards will be auctioned off to raise funds for Ukraine relief effort, and we plan on collaborating closely with local charity organisations and auction platforms to ensure that the project's proceeds be channelled to those in need. Together with all our effort at community building through this kind of initiative that aims at promoting social cohesion, inclusivity, and collective well-being, we can make a real difference in the lives of the people of Ukraine – one stamp at the time.

May our gratitude to all of those who have contributed to this project be felt.

Stamp Out War project is now entering the auction phase. For more information, please visit <https://www.stampoutwar.com/>.