



Editorial - On The Art of Judging Displays

Actually, I'm not really sure there *is* an art to judging displays. I have a hunch that most judges, experienced or not, end up voting simply on gut feeling. And the more I ponder that [*I ponder a lot*], the more I'm becoming convinced that it's the truth.

Of course, the lot of a display judge is often not an easy one. There is a polarity of criteria, I think. On the one side, and this is the side I lean to, you have the covers, themselves. So, in a 'Best Airlines Display' competition, for example, I would be focused on the *covers*. Are they appropriate entries? What is there about those covers that gives them the advantage over the displayed covers of the adjacent entry? Are they older, rarer, more complete, represent something I've never seen before? And so on. Personally, it wouldn't normally matter to me how they were arranged, what kind of case or frame they were in, how 'pretty' the display was, etc. In other words, the displayer would have a very hard time swaying my vote with the 'attractiveness' and 'creativity' factors of his or her display.

Even as I say that, though, I'm well aware of the *other* side of the argument. "It's not advertised as a *cover* contest. It's a *display* contest, dummy!" So, one might well argue, "Of course the covers are important, but the manner in which they're presented *certainly* has to figure prominently in any *display* contest! Does not *display* mean "to show"?! Point scored. I can't argue with that.

Still, call me a purist...elitist...or just a nutcase, but it would bother me to no end to realize that my display of better *covers* lost out to a display that was simply better *packaged*. "But," you argue, "whose to say one way or another?" Aha! "*The judge!*" I triumphantly retort, as I inwardly crow at having so cunningly lured you into my intricately woven trap of logic. "And the *judge* can so easily be swayed by the packaging while the actual content becomes secondary, at best...Yes! You know it's true! You can't deny it! It happens everywhere every day! Walk down any supermarket aisle, for goodness sake!"

Should my 1910 Washington Crisps covers display lose to that other guy's D.D. Bean vending machine covers display just because I had my covers lined up in a single row, while he had his arranged in the shape of Washington throwing a dollar across the Potomac...on horseback...in a rowboat...sitting in a cherry tree?

When I judge displays at AMCAL, I always go by a piece of advice given by an earlier mentor..."Ask yourself which covers you would most like to have in your own collection, and vote for *that* display!"

And, of course, there is (or was) always the possibility of outright lobbying from the displayers. When I first entered the hobby in the early 1980s, it was blatant at the conventions I attended...a 'casual' remark in the ear of an official judge or club member casting a vote about a certain display up for judging. I still smile at the memory of a certain noted collector (now deceased) who had the whole process down to a science! No, displays should always remain anonymous as far as anyone voting is concerned. The logic in that would seem obvious. Still, to everyone's credit, I haven't seen or heard much of lobbying since those earlier days.

Perhaps I'm asking too much. Judges, *and* contestants, are only human, I suppose. We're all swayed by the outside before we ever look at the inside...That's how I ended up married, after all!