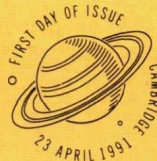
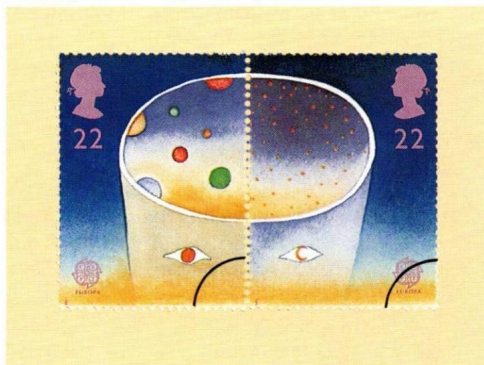


Europe in Space

23 April 1991



The 1991 Europa stamps, to be issued on 23 April, have as their theme "Europe in Space" – adopted by the Conference of European Posts and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT), to honour the major contribution to our knowledge of the Universe being made by European astronomers at La Palma in the Canary Islands. The stamps comprise se-tenant pairs of 22p and 37p stamps featuring thought-



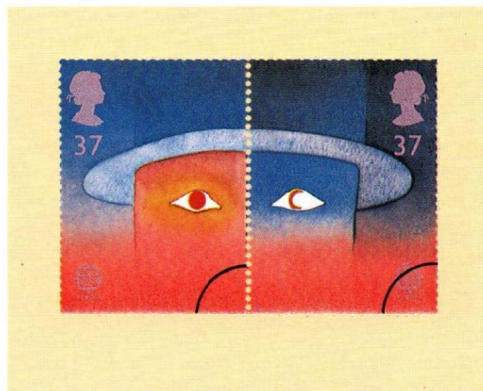
provoking illustrations designed to challenge us to explore questions which astronomers at La Palma may one day be able to answer. The 22p stamps cover the basic first class inland and EEC rate and the airmail outside Europe basic rate (up to 10g) is catered for by the 37p values.

Peering out into worlds that may well have disappeared before ours was created, and at distances from us which defy imagination, astronomers have little difficulty in transcending earthly boundaries. Their perspective of our planet – which less than 600 years ago was believed to be the centre of the Universe – is a humble speck of dust while our own galaxy is really of marginal significance since it is dwarfed by millions of others infinitely more vast. Above all, they realise that, despite tremendous advances in astronomy in the last 30 years, they have barely scratched the surface. To them, knowledge shared on an international scale is more than good manners – it is a vital necessity.

The spirit of international co-operation is clearly demonstrated by the work at *El Observatorio del Roque de los Muchachos* (Observatory of

the Rocks of the Two Boys) on La Palma in the Canary Islands. There is based a multi-European team of astronomers from Britain, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Spain and Ireland. The observatory is situated at an altitude of 2,350 metres – above the cloud levels and so ideal for astronomical observation. La Palma was chosen in the 1970s when the Royal Greenwich Observatory found that the British weather and urban lighting were causing difficulties at its Herstmonceux (Sussex) site. Today the Observatory's Isaac Newton telescope stands at La Palma alongside another British telescope (William Herschel) and telescopes from other European nations. All are computer-controlled; movements of the Herschel, the third largest reflector in the world, can be operated by astronomers from computers at the Royal Greenwich Observatory's Cambridge headquarters.

The designs of these stamps, by Jean-Michel Folon, are far from conventional and aim to get the general public and stamp collectors to think about the wonders of space and the fact that our planet is but a tiny fragment of the Universe. In so doing the artist wishes us to realise that Time



as we are used to thinking of it is insignificant; we need to try to visualise Time as infinite. The 22p stamp designs aim to inspire thought of looking out into space beyond the Earth; the 37p designs suggest us as we might be seen by others – if, as may well be, there is life on other planets.

As yet we do not know but there is no conclusive proof that such life does not exist. If the designs of the stamps make us ponder such questions they will have fulfilled their purpose well.

Technical Details

The stamps were designed by Jean-Michel Folon and printed by Harrison & Sons Limited in photogravure on phosphor-coated paper. They are of vertical format, 31 x 40mm, printed in sheets of 100 with PVA Dextrin gum. Perforation measures 14 x 15.

M. Folon is a highly-acclaimed Belgian artist who now lives in France. He is well-known for his exhibition poster designs. He designed two stamps for the French Post Office to commemorate the Philexfrance international stamp exhibition in 1982 (S.G. 2520-1).

Presentation Pack

The pack (No. 217) will cost £1.50; it was printed by Raithby, Lawrence.

Royal Mail Stamp Cards

Cards, featuring enlargements of the stamp designs, will be available approximately two weeks before the stamp issue, price 19p each. They are numbered 134A-D.

First Day Cover

The Royal Mail first day cover will be available from the British Philatelic Bureau, "Collections" centres, philatelic counters and main post offices approximately two weeks before 23 April, price 19p. Two pictorial postmarks will be used for the first day cover service — one for the Bureau, the other for Cambridge.

A first day cover service will be provided by the Bureau with the official Royal Mail cover addressed to the destination required with the stamps cancelled with the requested postmark. Application forms, available from the Bureau and main post offices, should be returned not later than 23 April.

Collectors may send their own cards/covers for the pictorial postmarks; these should be sent on the first day of issue in a stamped outer envelope endorsed "Pictorial First Day of Issue Postmark" to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH EH3 5TT (Bureau postmark) or South East Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail Windsor, Peascod Street, WINDSOR, Berks, SL4 1AA (Cambridge postmark). Collectors wanting their cards/covers

returned under cover should enclose a suitable addressed envelope. This need not bear additional postage stamps, the postage being already paid by the stamps affixed to the covers for postmarking.

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for those collectors who wish to post covers to receive the standard, non-pictorial "First Day of Issue" handstamps.

A number of special handstamps sponsored by stamp dealers and others, will be used on 23 April — details of these will be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin*, available on subscription from the British Philatelic Bureau.

Souvenir Cover

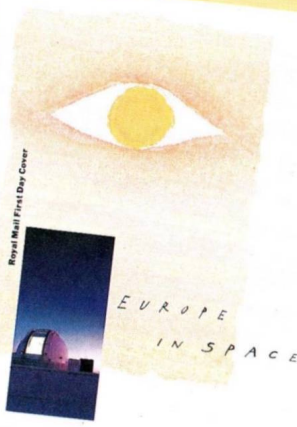
A souvenir cover, of similar design to the first day cover, will be available from "Collections" centres and philatelic counters from 24 April, price 19p. This will be on sale for one year.

Air Packs

A new product — Royal Mail International's padded "AirPack" — went on trial sale at main post offices in the London and Anglia areas last September. Ideal for sending items of up to 500g weight by the airmail small packet service, it bears a POSTAGE PAID ILS 25 GREAT BRITAIN printed postage impression and an attractive



aircraft design. Measuring approx. 395 x 330mm, European and Worldwide versions are available, price £2.25 and £4.99 respectively. It is expected that the packs will go on national sale at main post offices from April. Please note that these packs will not be available from the British Philatelic Bureau, "Collections" centres or philatelic counters.

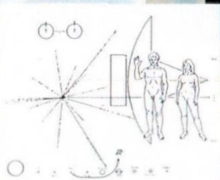
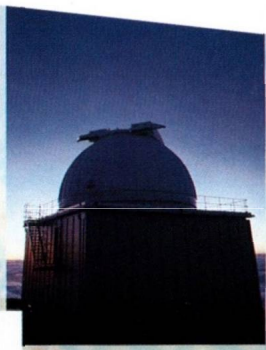


Royal Mail First Day Cover



Mrs J Robinson
200 Manorbier Road
ILKESTON
Derbyshire
DE7 4AB

Background images:
CCD image, captured by the
Jacobus Kapteyn Telescope,
of the Crab nebula and a
view of planet Earth taken
from space.



A CCD camera on the Isaac
Newton Telescope and
computer enhancement
produced this image of the
NGC 7752 and NGC 7753
galaxies.

of La Palma at an altitude of 2,350 metres, is one of the best sites in the world for astronomical observations. A prevailing temperature inversion in the area keeps cloud levels below the observation site and ensures clear, pollution-free skies virtually the whole year round.

La Palma was chosen in the 1970s when the Royal Greenwich Observatory, realising that British weather and encroaching urban lighting hampered observations from the Isaac Newton Telescope at Herstmonceux

Castle in Sussex, approached Spain about relocating the telescope on the island. Today, the Isaac Newton Telescope stands on top of La Palma alongside the Anglo-Dutch William Herschel and Jacobus Kapteyn Telescopes, the Anglo-Danish Carlberg Automatic Meridian Circle, the Swedish Solar and Stellar Telescopes and the Nordic Optical Telescope.

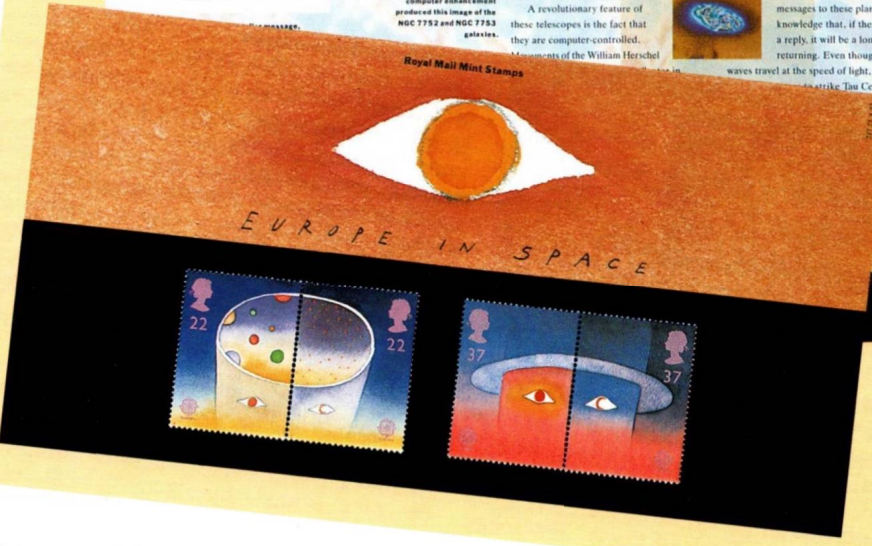
A revolutionary feature of these telescopes is the fact that they are computer-controlled. Moments of the William Herschel

suggest that this process...
The cycle of day and night, the Sun and the Moon, the solar system – all of these we understand to some degree. But what about galaxies, quasars and the universe? Is the artist tempting us to take the hat off earthly constraints and delve into a totally new dimension – to visualise time which has no beginning and space which has no boundary? Does the all-pervasive eye represent us looking out or someone else looking in?

Although astronomers have yet to find positive evidence of life as we know it beyond this planet, they have proof that the conditions which life needs are common in the universe. What is more, their scientific training challenges them to ask why, if life is sustainable on this insignificant planet, it should not exist elsewhere?

Experiments are, in fact, being carried out with the William Herschel Telescope to determine whether other planets exist in orbit around nearby stars. The motions of these stars will show if they have planets pulling them from side to side. And, if such planets are found, what then?

In the future, astronomers could well be beaming radio messages to these planets in the knowledge that, if there is to be a reply, it will be a long time returning. Even though radio waves travel at the speed of light, they would take 12 years to reach Tau Ceti, the



planet
Earth
in 2002.
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ply!