

# The Color of Money

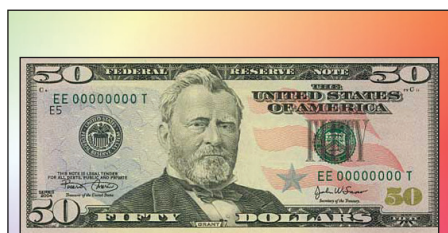
*With their vibrant, rainbow hues and palettes, coins and currency allow hobbyists to experience the full spectrum of numismatics.*

WHEN THE adjective “colorful” is applied to numismatics, it’s more than a metaphor. Sure, the hobby is full of compelling tales and interesting characters, but when it comes to coins and currency, references to color also can be taken quite literally. From the multiple hues of coinage metals to the diverse palettes of paper money, numismatics offers many ways to appreciate the full spectrum of the colors of money.

A coin’s color is a significant part of its identity and, sometimes, the basis for serious cases of mistaken identity. Continuity of color was important in



▲ This Walking Liberty half dollar probably picked up its colorful toning from its environment. A 2006 Canadian quarter with the familiar pink ribbon associated with breast-cancer research is particularly innovative in its use of color. Not Actual Size



▲ The red, white and blue of the U.S. flag ripples across our current \$50 bill. A Series 1869 U.S. \$2 “Rainbow note” features a portrait of President Thomas Jefferson and a view of the Capitol. Not Actual Size



1965, when silver U.S. dimes and quarters were replaced with similar-looking copper-nickel-clad coins. The same was true in 1982, when cents with a zinc core were copper plated to mimic their bronze predecessors.

But, confusion results when different denominations have common coloration. The 1943 steel cents were similar in size and color to dimes, and the Anthony dollars of 1979-80 resembled quarters; neither lasted long. The U.S. Mint was more successful in distinguishing the 2000 Sacagawea dollar itself, as the coin was dubbed the “golden dollar” for its color, not its content.

Worldwide, coinage alloys generally

feature a few primary colors. Copper is a fiery orange-red, while copper alloys with sizable amounts of zinc or aluminum display a yellowish color. Copper-nickel blends range from yellow to white, while nickel, aluminum and stainless steel have a silvery appearance. Some coins are bimetallic, with a center of one alloy surrounded by a ring of another color.

Two recent Canadian circulating coins are particularly innovative in their use of color, with special inks applied in the minting process. Their colors are associated with worthy causes: the red poppy on the 2004 quarter honors casualties of war, while the pink ribbon on the 2006 quarter advocates breast-cancer research.



▲ A golden sunflower and a prismatic lighthouse with a colorful beacon add artistic vibrancy to Netherlands 50- and 250-guilder bank notes. Not Actual Size

PHOTOS: ANA ARCHIVES

PHOTOS: WWW.RGARS.NL/MONEY/NOTE

A coin's coloration is not necessarily constant over time. Circulation turns copper coins from red to brown and fades the brilliance of other alloys. Various elements of a coin's storage environment—particularly sulfur—can impart colorful changes to its surface. Such “toning” often is found on Morgan dollars (as well as other silver coins) that were stored in canvas bags for decades.

Paper money offers even more opportunities for colorful designs and variations. American bank notes have been known as “greenbacks” since the mid 19th century, when green ink was introduced to discourage photographic counterfeiting. Colorful images are abundant on large-size notes, including Series 1869 “Rainbow notes” and Series 1905 \$20 “Technicolor notes.”

In the 20th century, small-size notes generally had uniform and mostly monochromatic designs. But

the vivid colors of the Treasury Seal distinguished various types: gold for gold certificates, blue for silver certificates, red for legal-tender notes, brown for National Bank notes and green for Federal Reserve notes.

Color has made another splash on American currency in the past decade, with even more elaborate designs to deter counterfeiters. Contemporary notes feature background tints and colorful imagery, including a red, white and blue flag on the current \$50 bill. And in the lower-right corner of most notes, denominations are printed in ink that changes color depending on the viewing angle.

Foreign currency uses an even more extensive palette. Each Canadian denomination has a distinctive color scheme, and some include holographic strips and iridescent, color-changing design elements. Many other colorful motifs brighten world currency, including a yellow sun-

flower and a prismatic lighthouse on Netherlands notes introduced in the 1980s.

Speaking of printed works, these days, more and more full-color references are available to enliven your numismatic bookshelf. The world's coinage and currency come to life in *All the Money in the World* by ANA Curator of Exhibits Douglas Mudd, *Art of Money* by David Standish and *The Complete Illustrated Guide to Coins and Coin Collecting* by James MacKay. *U.S. Coins and Currency* by Allen Berman presents numerous color images of American issues as well.

Monetary coloration serves several purposes: it aids identification, enhances decoration and deters deception. With an interest in numismatics and an eye for color, you're sure to find a veritable rainbow of coins and currency to collect.

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