

Down the Rabbit Hole with Lady Liberty

In 1865, Lewis Carroll coined the phrase “down the rabbit hole” to describe Alice’s foray into the fantastical world called Wonderland. It has become a metaphor for an engrossing and time-consuming distraction—such as an allegedly straightforward Google search.

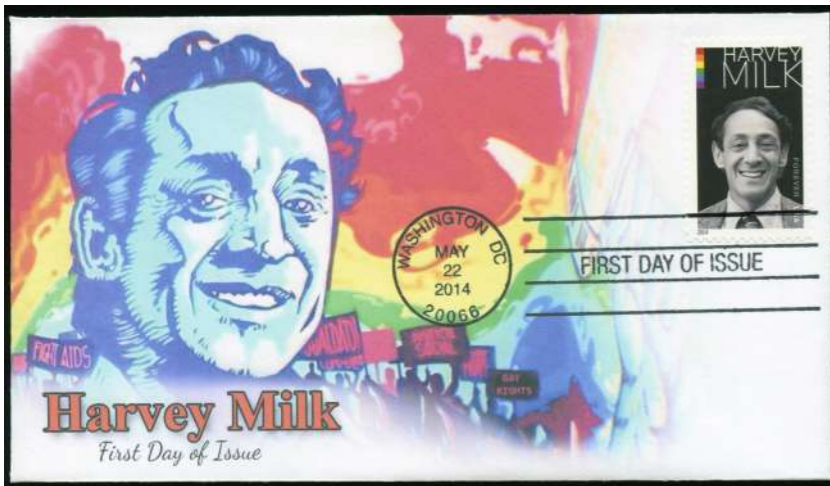
My journey begins with a small exhibit of the rainbow flag ...



Almost 20 countries have issued stamps featuring the Pride Flag. In 2017, **Canada** issued twelve stamps to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Confederation; one stamp marked the passage of the Civil Marriage Act of 2005. **Argentina** issued nine stamps featuring new laws and policies affecting Argentine society in 2014; one marked the marriage equality law in 2010. **Sweden** celebrated LGBTQ rights with a bold stamp in 2016, as did **Spain** in 2020. In 2021, **New Zealand** showed the “Progress Pride Flag”, redesigned by Portland based artist Daniel Quasar, representing the broadening of the movement to include trans, non-binary individuals and those lost to the AIDS crisis.



This colourful and ubiquitous symbol of pride in the LGBTQ movement was designed in 1978 by artist and gay rights activist Gilbert Baker (1951–2017), at the encouragement of San Francisco Councilman Harvey Milk (1930–1978), the first openly gay elected official in California ...



The United States honoured Harvey Milk with a stamp in 2014, which includes a tiny stripe of the flag (upper left). The cachet by Kevin Colton (KSC Cachets) features a blowing pride flag behind Milk and advocates for equal rights. (illustration reduced)



... One stamp stood out for me, issued by Uruguay in 2013 to commemorate the legalization of gay marriage. It features centre of the 1830 masterpiece *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (“Liberty Leading the People”) by Eugène Delacroix. Cleverly, the stamp replaces the French tricolour with the rainbow flag ...

Uruguay (December 16, 2013) taps into history, suggesting a growing movement for liberty for people in the LGBTQ community.

... which led me to explore the original painting, featured on many stamps to mark the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, such as this sheet from Argentina. This revolutionary painting, portrays Liberty as a daughter of the people, alive and fiery, embodying revolt and victory. She wears a Phrygian cap, a symbol of liberty, leading the people to victory across a landscape littered with the dead. The musical *Les Misérables* captures the mood well—“Do you hear the people sing? Singing a song of angry men? It is the music of a people who will not be slaves again!” The painting honours the July Revolution of 1830, the final triumph of the 1789 Revolution and the overthrow of the Bourbon regime ...



... the journey continues with the same painting on a sheet from São Tomé e Príncipe. In addition to the painting and its artist, it shows eight Marianne definitives issued by France in 1982 ...

Why Marianne? In 1982 President François Mitterrand chose this face of Lady Liberty for the new series of Mariannes ...



São Tomé e Príncipe (illustration reduced) and the lowest and highest values of the 1982 French Marianne definitives.

... which led me to explore those French definitives, which have shown various likenesses of Marianne since 1944. Helpfully, France issued a sheet in November 2008 showing the Mariannes of the Fifth Republic (the current government) from 1959–2008 ...

- Decaris Marianne, Albert Decaris (1960)
- Cocteau Marianne, Jean Cocteau (1961)
- Decaris Cock, Albert Decaris (1962–1965)
- Cheffer Marianne, Henri Cheffer (1967)
- Béquet Marianne, Pierre Béquet (1971–1974)
- Marianne à la Nef, André Regagnon (1959)
- Sabine Marianne, Pierre Gandon (1977–1978)
- Liberté, Pierre Gandon, after Delacroix (1982)
- Briat Marianne, "Marianne du Bicentenaire", Louis Briat (1990–1992)
- Luquet Marianne, "Marianne du 14 juillet", Eve Luquet (1997)
- The Lamouche Marianne, "Marianne des Français", Thierry Lamouche (2005–2007)
- Marianne de Beaujard, "Marianne et l'Europe", Yves Beaujard (2008)

... the ideals of Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité embodied by Marianne are also the fervent hopes of the LGBTQ community, as shown on these two stamps ...

... and we climb out of the rabbit hole to where we started. A fascinating journey to be sure.

