

BUTTERFLIES IN CULTURE, ART, SCULPTURE, AND ARCHITECTURE

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During the Greek Classical period and for many centuries later, letters were sealed with wax. The wax was embossed with a design by pressing a carved gemstone into it before it hardened. These stones were carved with countless images—butterflies, alone and in combination with other designs, among them.

The Emperor Augustus chose as his emblem a butterfly held in the claws of a crab, accompanied by the motto “make haste slowly.”



Augustus coin with Imperial emblem

Culture

Butterflies are the subject of many beautiful Chinese legends, stories, and philosophical discussions. An early Taoist philosopher, Chuang Tzu, believed that he lay dormant during the daytime, but that at night he awoke transformed into a butterfly and flew about sipping nectar in a flower garden.

As he thought about this, he found he could not decide whether he was really a butterfly or a man. It might be, he reasoned, that he was a man during the night dreaming that he was a butterfly by day. This identity crisis resulted in a lengthy philosophical argument that still has its repercussions.

Perhaps Chuang Tzu secretly thought the carefree life of a butterfly so desirable that in his subconscious mind he was, indeed, a butterfly. In any case, he certainly did not subscribe to the western idea that man was given dominion over the earth and all other animals. He took the Buddhist view that man was but a part of the spectrum of life, and that, although superior to other animals, he could learn much by observing and studying them. Western man can, without qualms, catch and kill a butterfly. A Chinese philosopher would rather contemplate it—a more popular view among naturalists than scientists.

On 15 February 2003, Macao issued a strip of four stamps and a souvenir sheet titled, “Legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai.” This tale has been a household love story in China for more than 1,000 years. The heroine, Zhu Yingtai, disguised as a man, becomes bosom friends with Liang Shanbo, a classmate for three years. Before returning home, Zhu implies to Liang that she will be his wife.

Knowing that Zhu is a woman, the delighted Liang hurries to her home, only to find that her family has betrothed her to someone else against her will. Under the pressure of the patriarchal clan rules and feudal ethnics, they die for love and turn into a pair of butterflies. The moving tragic legend extols pure love and freedom of love.



Legend of Liang Shanbo & Zhu Yingtai
Macao, 2003, Sc#1115

From people the world over, butterflies elicit responses of admiration, wonder, and delight accorded to no other insect. They spark the imagination of poets and writers. Two thousand years ago, Roman poet Ovid wrote in his *Metamorphosis*, “Worms that weave their white cocoons on the leaves of trees change into funereal butterflies.”

“The butterflies—what an educated sense of beauty they have,” wrote Englishman Philip S. Robinson in his delightful little book, *The Poets and Nature*.

Different species of butterflies were depicted by German writer Thomas Mann in his novel *Doctor Faustus*. American writer Edgar Allan Poe depicted the moth *Acherontia atropos* in the story, "The Sphinx."

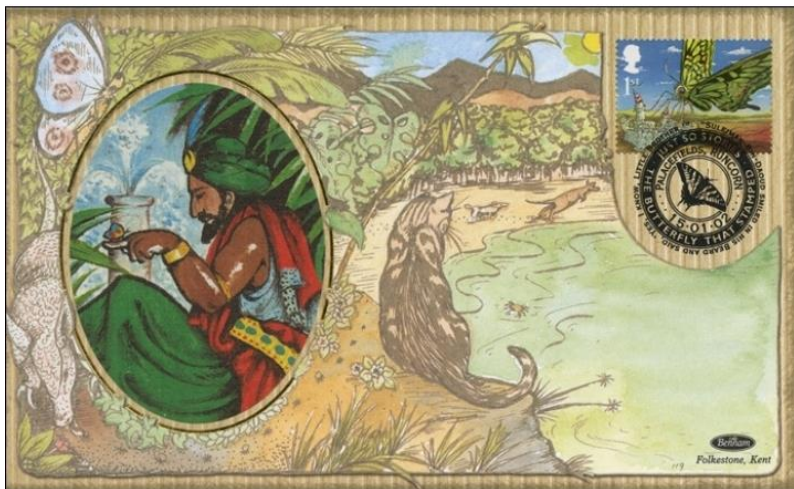
We meet with butterflies in many novels including, *The Children of Captain Grant* and *A Captain at Fifteen* by Jules Verne, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, and *Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling.

We also find butterflies in fairy tales such as "The Butterfly" by Hans Christian Andersen and *The Magic Rainforest* by John Marsden.

We can discover images of butterflies in the works of Russian poets Vasily Jukovski, Fedor Glinca, Apollon Maikov, Afanasy Fet, Ivan Bunin, and Arseny Tarkovski.

In the 19th Century, composers like Grieg, Chopin, and Schumann took inspiration from butterflies. Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg wrote a lyric piece "Butterfly."

Polish composer Frederic Chopin wrote an etude titled "Butterfly," and German composer Robert Schumann wrote a suite of piano pieces titled "Butterflies."



"The Butterfly That Stamped" from *Just So Stories*
Great Britain, 2002, Sc#2016



Pucini
Monaco, 1983, Sc#1390

The famous Italian composer Giacomo Puccini wrote an opera titled "Madam Butterfly" that had its first performance on 17 February 1904, in La Scala Theatre in Milan



Chopin & Schumann
Monaco, 1985, Sc#1498

The great Italian ballerina Marie Taglioni devised a ballet titled "Butterfly" using an Offenbach score about a young girl who is turned into a butterfly by an evil fairy. First performed at the Paris Opera in November 1860, the ballet was an immediate success. The ballet was retired and languished for over a century until it was revived by Ronald Hynd for the Houston ballet.



"Butterfly" ballet
New Zealand, 2003, Sc#1856



In 1958, China People's Republic issued a stamp for 700th Anniversary of dramatist Kuan Han-Ching with an illustration of his opera titled *The Butterfly Dream*.

The Butterfly Dream
China P.R., 1958, Sc#357a

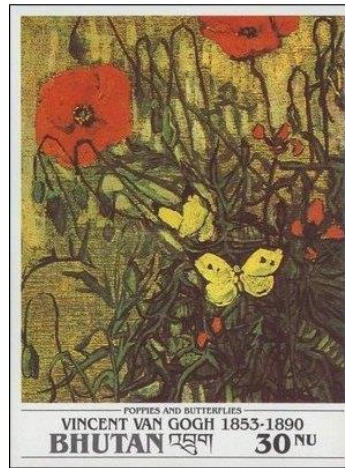
Art

Butterflies, small, ephemeral, glittering with life and color, are the Chinese ivories, the Limoges enamels, the Renaissance jewelry—the artistic miniatures of the living world, worthy to be both understood and admired. Butterflies, as one of the most beautiful creatures of nature, get a wide reflection in painting.

Some example paintings include “Poppies and Butterflies” by Van Gogh, “Peony and Butterfly” by Shigenobu, “Apollo on a Thistle” by Švabinský, “The Reapers” by Venetsianov, and “Fire Dance” by Gyoshu.

The graceful Butterfly Dance is regularly performed in southwestern Pueblo Indian villages of the USA, where the butterfly is a symbol of peace, fertility, and agricultural success.

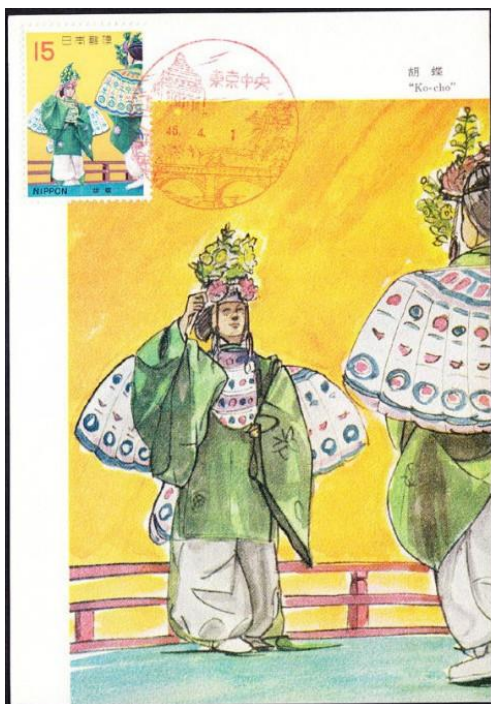
It is usually performed by male and female pairs, though in some villages it is done only after a formal request from the woman. The Butterfly Dance also often is performed in Japan for opening holiday or festive occasions.



“Poppies and Butterflies”
Bhutan, 1991, Sc#1018



“The Reapers”
Russia, 1968, Sc#3549



Japanese Butterfly Dance
Japan, 1971, Sc#1052



American Indian Butterfly Dance
USA, 1996, Sc#3073

The love of butterflies in Japan knows no boundaries and there is no other nation in the world that has such an affection for those delicate creatures. In Japan, they consider that seeing a butterfly at your house brings happiness and that butterflies symbolize all the best in a person's life. Therefore, the ritual “butterfly dance” that expresses the joy of life traditionally opens galas, processions, and festivals. This dance is very

popular in Japan and is well known as the oldest type of dance in the Orient. Festival floats decorated with butterflies are often used at Japanese traditional celebrations.

Sculpture

According to the legend, Cupid, son of Venus, fell in love with the beautiful young girl Psyche and she with him. Every night he flew to earth and the two spent the hours of darkness in ecstatic bliss, wrapped in each other's arms. However, Psyche was warned by her lover that she must never look on his face. Naturally, since she was mortal, curiosity triumphed and Cupid fled.

The heartbroken girl wandered to the ends of the earth vainly seeking her lost love. Finally, Jupiter took pity on her, rendered her immortal and the lovers were reunited to live forever among the gods. Thus Psyche achieved a dual personality and butterfly wings (the butterfly symbolizing the soul of the departed). She became recognized not only as the image of the immortal soul, but also as the symbol of the anguish and triumph of love. A statue of Psyche with butterfly wings may be found on a stamp from Syria issued on 5 September 1973.



Psyche Stature
Syria, 1973, Sc#664



Monarch Statue
Pacific Grove, California

Pacific Grove in California has a statue of a butterfly, because the Monarch from western North America spends the winter in that location. They have a huge Monarch butterfly carved in Pacific granite and dedicated to this wonderful creature that calls Pacific Grove its winter home.

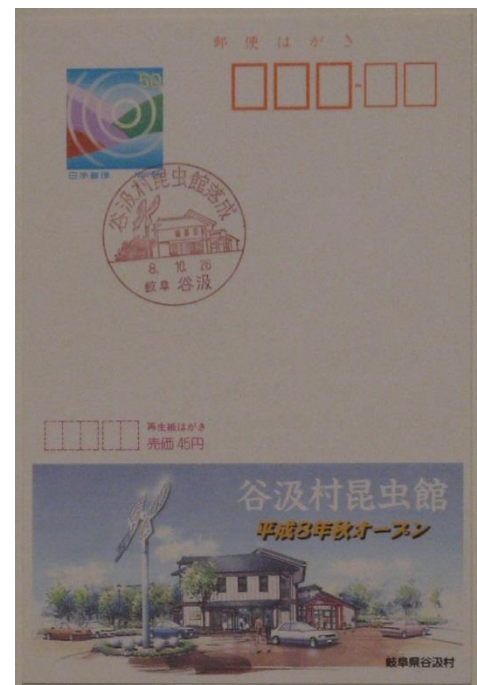
Japan issued postal stationery in 1996 with a special cancel and an advertising picture of Tanikumi village insectarium in Gifu Prefecture including a butterfly monument. The monument shows a butterfly called Gifucho (*Luehdorfia japonica*) discovered

in this prefecture by the naturalist Y. Nama.

The use of the American Cactus Moth (*Cactoblastis cactorum*) as a biological weapon is well known. The larvae feed on Prickly Pear cactus, which had been imported into Australia and become a wide spread pest species. Large numbers of the moth were transferred to Australia and had great success in disposing of the cactus. This fact is commemorated in Australia with a monument erected “in its lifetime.”

Architecture

A 1966 Russian postal card contains an illustration of a holiday hotel named “Moth,” with buildings having an architectural superstructure in the form of a flying moth.



Butterfly Monument
Japan, 1996

Also, a 1997 stationery card of Japan 1997 has an illustration of a building with a roof in a butterfly form.

Butterflies are among the most colorful creatures in the world. They have been described as “flying flowers.” Butterflies entertain children. Babies with soul trembling reach for a magnificent creature of nature, which is butterfly. Butterflies create positive emotions and improve one’s mood and a feeling of peace in the mind, and so heal by their beauty.



Butterfly Building Design
Japan, 1997