

Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee

801 Ninth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20220



January 21, 2011

The Honorable Timothy F. Geithner
Secretary of the Treasury
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Geithner:

The designs on United States coins and medals are more than simple illustrations on small metal discs; they are expressions of the values, aspirations, and shared heritage of our Nation. They serve as illustrations to the world of the essence and the story of America. Therefore, the designs on United States coins and medals necessarily must be of a quality and must reflect the inspiration appropriate and befitting of the ideals of our great Nation.

The Citizens Coinage Advisory Committee (CCAC), acting in its statutory role to advise the Secretary of the Treasury on any theme or design proposals relating to circulating coinage, bullion coinage, congressional gold medals and national and other medals in accordance with section 5135 of title 31, United States Code, recently completed a study of the structure and procedures of the United States Mint as they relate to artistic design. The goal of our study was to provide recommendations that would advance the quality of designs on United States coins and medals by creating an environment that nurtures artistic creativity and excellence.

On behalf of the CCAC, I am attaching the Committee's report on its findings and recommendations on the subject of artistic excellence, *A Blueprint for Advancing Artistic Creativity and Excellence in United States Coins and Medals: Analysis and Recommendations* (Blueprint).

A public meeting of the CCAC was held on Wednesday, January 19, 2011, at United States Mint Headquarters in Washington, DC. At the meeting, the Committee reviewed the *Blueprint* and subsequently adopted it on a unanimous vote.

The impetus for the *Blueprint* was the vision articulated by former United States Mint Director Edmund C. Moy. On September 19, 2007, Director Moy delivered the opening

address at the biennial FIDEM Congress held in Colorado Springs. Speaking before delegates representing 32 countries, Director Moy announced his vision “to spark a neo-renaissance for coin design and achieve a new level of design excellence.” Shortly thereafter he included the advancement of artistic excellence as a part of the formal mission statement of the United States Mint.

On March 20, 2008, Director Moy conducted a Symposium for the Artistic Infusion Program artists in Philadelphia. His charge to the artists attending that conference was to “recreate the neo-Renaissance in coin design.” He said, “I want to surpass the golden age of coin design which began at the start of the 20th Century. If the 20th century continues to be called the Golden Age, I want the 21st century to be known as the “platinum Age” of coinage.”

By June 30, 2009, the Office of the Director, United States Mint, produced a white paper, “Aspiring to Artistic Excellence” which articulates and defines the meaning of artistic excellence at the United States Mint. The introduction of the white paper noted, “The United States Mint has achieved some great success with certain coin and medal design, but overall, there is still much room for improvement.”

By the summer of 2010, the need to review the practices and procedures of the United States Mint as they relate to coin and medal design had become abundantly clear. On May 28, 2010, the United States Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) issued a letter to Director Moy, confirming Moy’s observation that there is “much room for improvement.” The CFA letter comments that the quality of designs is “embarrassingly low, both in the often amateurish character of the artwork and in the generally poor compositions...” Members of the CCAC have repeatedly noted similar observations.

On July 27, 2010, the CCAC approved a new scoring system for evaluation of designs which requires a minimum 50 percent score before any design may be considered for a recommendation. Since implementing the new scoring system, the CCAC has reviewed 128 designs. Only 18 of those designs earned scores from the Committee that were high enough to exceed the 50 percent threshold and, thus, be considered worthy to be recommended for placement on United States coins and medals. These results, coupled with the observations of Director Moy, the CFA, and the CCAC, are alarming and serve as a clear indication that swift action is needed to reform the artistic structure and processes within the United States Mint.

On June 28, 2010, I exercised my statutory authority as Chair of the CCAC to form the Subcommittee on Coin Design Excellence (Subcommittee). I tasked the subcommittee with developing a comprehensive set of recommendations addressing design quality. My formation of the Subcommittee was in response to several factors, including Director Moy’s recognition that improvement in design quality is needed and his corresponding call for artistic excellence, the observations of the CFA expressing concern for the poor quality of designs, and the CCAC’s paralleling concerns for the lack of artistic quality evident in United States Mint designs.

The Subcommittee obtained and reviewed documents and operational procedures, interviewed sculptor-engravers, senior managers and senior executives at the United States Mint who are directly involved in coin and medal design and approval processes. The Subcommittee also interviewed other employees for input on legal and legislative matters, art creation, marketing, sales, production, engraving, stakeholder outreach, and administrative management functions. Interviews were conducted at both the United States Mint at Philadelphia and United States Mint Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Eighteen interviews were completed.

Interviewees were allotted between 30 and 60 minutes with the Subcommittee during normal business hours. The Subcommittee asked a series of questions concerning working conditions, creativity, coin and medal design processes and interactions among departments within the Mint. The Subcommittee also encouraged interviewees to discuss issues that they felt were affecting their work and to offer suggestions for improvement. The Subcommittee refrained from asking leading questions, proposing solutions or endorsing any idea presented to it.

The findings and recommendations of the Subcommittee have been reported to the full CCAC, the CFA, and Director Moy. Subsequently, the aforementioned parties collaborated to develop and refine the recommendations included in the CCAC's Blueprint.

The following summarizes the Blueprint's recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION #1:

That all responsibility for artistic design be removed from the United States Mint Sales and Marketing Department and that the Design Working Group be abolished. We recommend, instead, that the position of Art Director be created and that a Timetable Task Force (TTF) be established to coordinate and streamline the artistic and manufacturing schedules.

By default, the Sales and Marketing Department has assumed the dominant role in guiding the designs of coins and medals. The Design Working Group (DWG) was originally created to coordinate manufacturing timetables and to interface with stakeholder groups. With one exception, none of the members of the DWG has any training or background in art (the notable exception being Chief Engraver John Mercanti, who plays a limited role in the DWG). Nevertheless, the DWG has assumed the role of directing and coordinating the Artistic Infusion Program* (AIP) artists as well as the in-house United States Mint Sculptor-Engravers.

An Art Director, with formal training in art history, fine arts, sculpture or related fields and at least four (4) years prior experience as an art director should be hired to manage and direct AIP and United States Mint artists; manage the artistic aspects of all

* The Artistic Infusion Program comprises artists who are independent contractors, recruited and selected by the United States Mint, to supplement the design development functions of United States Mint Sculptor-Engravers.

stakeholders, including the CFA and the CCAC; and be responsible for ensuring that proposed designs not only meet the highest standards of artistic excellence, but also comply with the historical, legal and technical requirements of the coin or medal program for which the proposed designs were produced. It is important that the Art Director report directly to the United States Mint Director.

The DWG should be abolished. Instead, a Timetable Task Force (TTF) – chaired by the Art Director, and comprising representatives from the Office of Chief Counsel, the Sales and Marketing Department, and the Manufacturing Department – should perform the scheduling function and advise the Art Director on historical, legal and technical matters. In no event should the artistic merits of a proposed design be discussed or considered by the TTF.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

That the status of the United States Mint Sculptor-Engravers be elevated, that their creativity be encouraged and utilized in design projects and that the current call for Artistic Infusion Program request for proposals (RFP) be substantially revised to elevate the creative qualities of originality and innovation—to the same level of importance expressed in the current RFP for the basic competency requirements of technical draftsmanship.

A product of the current default design process is a practice described by United States Mint artists as “trace and bake”. “Trace and bake” is a process employed for certain coin design projects in which artists are directed to use existing source materials—historical photos and artwork—for portraiture and other subject matter and to simply reproduce such materials in a near-copied form to produce designs for current use. The practice of “trace and bake” must end. Instead, artists should be encouraged to pursue original interpretive designs. They should use symbolism, allegory and abstraction rather than rely primarily on realistic or literal depictions of design themes. Artists should always consider the size of the palette and simplify designs whenever possible.

Coins and medals should be recognized as three-dimensional pieces of hand-held sculpture, and artists should be encouraged to design both the obverse and reverse whenever possible. Thinking of the two sides of a coin or medal as a complete vision would encourage a full sculptural expression of a design rather than a two-dimensional picture on a disc of metal. Including the use of the edge of a coin or medal as a third surface, where such use would support the design quality of the obverse and reverse, should also be encouraged.

Given the goal of creating brilliant works of art through United States coins and medals, the treatment and status of the artists involved in the creative process must be accorded focused and sustained attention. The artists who design our Nation’s coins and medals should be highlighted in marketing materials. Resources should be allocated for artists to sculpt from life and on site; to encourage them to perform independent research on assigned tasks; to provide more suitable work space for them and to allow flexible hours to encourage creativity.

Opportunities for professional training and art education at national and international seminars and workshops should be provided. Additionally, the United States Mint should sponsor attendance and participation for United States Mint artists at national and international exhibits of coin and medal art.

Coin and medal programs should be implemented before the end of 2011 that will provide immediate opportunities for artists to demonstrate and showcase the United States Mint's advancements in the area of artistic creativity and excellence. In 2009, the United States Mint utilized modern technology to fulfill Augustus Saint-Gaudens' vision of an ultra high relief coin that could not be realized in 1907 with his legendary Double Eagle liberty design. As a companion piece to the 2009 Saint-Gaudens Double Eagle, the United States Mint should produce an ultra high relief Double Eagle liberty design in 2011 utilizing a modern 21st century design of the traditional American Liberty theme. Additionally, candidate designs for the medal honoring Edmund C. Moy as the 38th Director of the United States Mint, which have been reviewed by the CCAC and the CFA, serve as important benchmark examples of design excellence. These designs utilize several modern design techniques and illustrate, in visual terms, the ideals of artistic creativity and design excellence. Finally, the opportunity for artists to experiment with creative and innovative designs—free from legislative and other limitations—should be created through the implementation of an annual art medal program. The art medal program would allow artists to utilize cutting edge advancements in design techniques and minting technology.

The current RFP call to artists for the Artist Infusion Program should be substantially revised. Greater emphasis should be placed on creative qualities such as originality and innovation. This emphasis should be equal to the emphasis accorded to the basic competency requirements of technical draftsmanship appearing in the current RFP. AIP artists should be managed, coordinated and directed by the Art Director without the involvement of the Sales and Marketing Department.

The Art Director should also be provided the flexibility to commission specific artists who are outside of the AIP or the staff Sculptor-Engravers to produce designs for particular projects if the subject matter would be best served by doing so. In this way, the United States Mint would be able to reach out to and benefit from America's finest sculptors in the production of coins and medals on subjects compatible with the work and style of specific sculptors-of-note. By the way of example only, if a coin or medal were to be produced to commemorate America's role in the Vietnam War, the artist who produced the bronze sculpture at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. might be commissioned to design such a coin or medal.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

We recommend changes in the methodology for design review at the CFA and the CCAC and we recommend that the United States Mint contract with an outside historian for assistance with historical accuracy of designs.

The roles of the CFA and the CCAC should become more integral to the design and review process with input from both groups being sought before and after designs are created. Production timelines should be designed to recognize the role of these groups and to assure that adequate time is allotted to support artistic design processes. The CFA and the CCAC should review and contribute to the draft narratives before the Art Director assigns corresponding projects to the artists. This would allow artistic discussions and comments that might be informative for the artists in maximizing their creativity and in producing designs with the content and quality sought by the CFA and CCAC.

The CFA and the CCAC should have an opportunity to preview and comment on all preliminary coin and medal designs. Preliminary review of designs could aid in the efficiency of design review meetings and better utilize the talents and contributions of the members of these two groups.

The Art Director should work to provide the CFA and CCAC a quantity and variety of designs for each project that facilitates deliberative and evaluative comparisons in each group's recommending processes. Ordinarily, not fewer than four different candidate designs of each proposed coin or medal—and, more routinely, several more than four candidate designs—should be submitted to the CFA or the CFA. Differences in lettering and changes in minor design elements should not be considered different designs.

Finally, an outside historian specializing in U.S. history should be contracted to support the Art Director in review of all historical designs before they are submitted to the CFA and the CCAC. Use of a contracted historian would be in addition to support currently provided by the in-house United States Mint historian and would provide reinforcement in the effort to assure historical accuracy in the designs on U.S. coins and medals.

The CCAC, with collaborative support from the CFA, respectfully submits the attached findings and recommendations, *A Blueprint for Advancing Artistic Creativity and Excellence in United States Coins and Medals: Analysis and Recommendations*. We stand ready to work with all involved parties to implement the *Blueprint's* recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary B. Marks". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "G" and "M".

Gary B. Marks
Chair