

Up Close and Personal

*A variety of tools and technology gives numismatists
a better appreciation of the beauty of their collections.*

THE IDEA that beauty is in the eye of the beholder certainly is true in numismatics. Collecting preferences range from modern proofs to well-traveled ancient coins, and everything in between. There are devotees of every spot on the numismatic rainbow: the yellow-orange glow of gold, the red-brown of copper, and the brilliant white or colorful toning of silver. And where some numismatists take a broad view of a coin's virtues, others focus their attention on particular design elements.

In spite of these differences, appreciating a coin's appearance is a vital part of numismatics for every kind of collector. Accordingly, this month I'll shed some light on various ways of looking at coins.

Light is not only a metaphor for knowledge, it's also a critical factor in revealing an object's appearance. For viewing coins, you'll want to use a light source of moderate brightness, around 1,200 to 1,600 lumens. A 75- or 100-watt, incandescent bulb is a good choice. The specific type of light also can affect your perception of a coin. Light bulbs that mimic natural daylight tend to do a good job of bringing out a coin's colors, while fluorescent or halogen lights aren't as flattering. Eye appeal depends on how light reflects off the surface of a coin, particularly an uncirculated piece. Try looking at your coins in a different light (literally) until you find a setup that suits you.

Magnification can help you focus on what's important. The power of a handheld magnifying glass (some are plastic) indicates how closely objects can be viewed and how much they appear to be enlarged. The best choice

depends on your purpose. To increase the apparent size of an entire coin, for general observation or possibly for grading, a 4x to 8x magnifier should work nicely. To examine the details of a coin's strike, or to see varieties like doubled dies or repunched mintmarks, higher power (10x to 15x) would be appropriate.

Lighting and magnification have long been a part of numismatics, but today's computer technology provides new tools and techniques for visualizing coins. Scanners and digital cameras produce full-color, computerized images that can be printed or viewed on a monitor. A single coin easily can fill an entire computer screen, and you can zoom in for a clear image of a small area. Scanners are somewhat more straightforward to operate and usually have higher resolution, but digital cameras generally are capable of higher quality. (For coin photography, you want one with macro capability.) Either one is an affordable and effective way of obtaining electronic images of your collection.

Numismatic imagery also can expose you to coins that are beyond

your direct experience. Just take a look at this issue of *Numismatist*—there are hundreds of diverse color photos literally at your fingertips. Numismatic photography is everywhere, often in full color. Grading guides enable you to compare your coins to published standards, reference books illustrate coins while telling you their stories, and auction catalogs allow dealers to show their offerings. You'll also find an abundance of numismatic images on the Internet. Dealers, organizations and individuals post pictures of every imaginable kind of collectible, creating a virtual coin collection that's as close as your nearest web browser.

Appreciating a numismatic item begins with a collector's eye for quality, beauty and detail. That vision, along with lighting, magnification or other imaging technology, allows a numismatist to grade coins, identify their characteristics or simply appreciate their aesthetic properties. Whatever your numismatic purpose, when beholding the beauty of your coins, what you see depends on how you look.

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Illumination, magnification and other tools allow collectors to see details the naked eye might miss.