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Celebration coins by Gary Taxali

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Today the Royal Canadian Mint is releasing a series of special celebration coins designed by Toronto illustrator Gary Taxali

Canadians have a certain irreverent humour going when it comes to their coinage. When the one dollar coin replaced notes in the 1980s, it was universally dubbed the loonie. Not only did it have a picture of a loon (a kind of waterfowl) on one side, but people thought it was 'loonie' to get rid of dollar bills. When the two dollar coin arrived, inevitably it became the toonie. So it seems fitting that the Toronto-based illustrator [Gary Taxali](#) was chosen to create imagery for six celebration coins by the Royal Canadian Mint. After all, his artwork is full of cheeky humour as well.

"That's what I love about my country," says Taxali. "Light-hearted nicknames for our coins is part of who we are. I would definitely agree with the cheeky fun part, but I think that comes from being a product of the monarchy. Maybe we're like the irreverent teenager that likes to poke a bit of fun at convention albeit absolutely respecting it."

Each of his 25 cent coins - known in Canada as 'quarters' - will be sold with a gift card marking a special event. So there's a birthday coin, a wedding coin, a new baby coin and even the brilliant tooth fairy coin. The O Canada coin has various maple leaf characters pulling different faces. They went on sale today at the mint's website, and could soon become collector's items.

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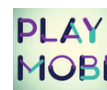
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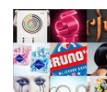
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Taxali - who has worked for some of the biggest publishers and advertising companies in the world - considers the coins to be one of the most important projects of his career. The mint not only allowed him to use his own typeface Chumply as part of the designs, but he was asked to put his initials on each one. "Until I held the coins in my hand, it was all just a dream. It feels wonderful, humbling, and very proud to be a part of Canadian history in this way. I'm a very lucky person," he says.

The project came about via the agency Young and Rubicam but working with an institution as auspicious as the Royal Canadian Mint, Taxali at first had some reservations. While it would be a huge honour to design some national currency, he wanted to protect his artistic integrity. However art director Dave Tupper told him: "They want you to do do the thing you do! These will be Gary Taxali coins and that's what The Mint wants!"

His worries allayed he set about creating characters in his iconic style - the themes were O Canada, new baby, holiday, wedding, birthday and tooth fairy. He his aim was to represent many of these themes subtly. The tooth fairy and wedding coins were trickiest. "I was stuck on the idea of just showing a tooth but it didn't feel magical, it felt dental," says Taxali. "Eventually, the fairy was introduced and this magical nymph seemed to make the whole thing come alive. She's my muse!"



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The wedding coin was even harder - there are so many visual bride and groom cliches that could have appeared but Taxali wanted to push for something wider reaching. Listening to a radio show talking about the legalisation of single sex marriages in the US led to a moment of inspiration. "Gay and lesbian people in America are fighting a big and important fight to have same sex marriage legalised. It dawned on me that same sex marriage is legal in Canada and as such, the coin needed to reflect that," says Taxali. "I came up with an idea of showing two wedding ring characters intertwined. They are non-gender specific so they can represent any two humans."



With the imagery agreed upon, the next step was to work with Dave Toeg at the Royal Canadian Mint to work out the reliefs on the coin surfaces - which parts would be raised, which would be recessed, and how the volume of Taxali's characters would be represented. So, the illustrator supplied some drawings to indicate how this might work. The results - giving a very three-dimensional effect with what is actually very little depth - are impressive.

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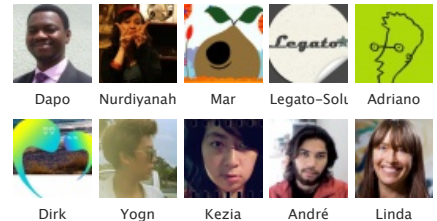
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Each card coin combo is being sold separately for \$19.95 and comes with a sticker that was also designed by Taxali, in colour. The first few have been released today. For his fans, the illustrator has also released a limited edition art print featuring the characters that appear in his coin series and you can see that in his [online shop](#).



Garrick Webster

Freelance writer Garrick Webster has contributed to Computer Arts going as far back as issue two. Aside from design, illustration and animation, his interests include ice hockey, tropical fish, fantasy art, crime fiction and baking hearty pies.

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