In 1848 Mauritius, then a British colony, issued stamps showing Queen Victoria at age 18. The soft copper plates wore down quickly, resulting in the changes visible in this group of early to late impressions. Some stamps contain an engraver’s error: “PENOE” instead of “PENCE.”

The famous—and of great rarity—Lady McLeod stamp on cover. One of many great rarities visitors will see up close in the Gross Gallery.

Visitors to the international gallery will be greeted by a 400-pound red Royal Mail pillar box that once stood on a Hong Kong street. It was donated to us in 1997, the year Great Britain handed the colony over to Chinese control. Since then, most of the boxes have been replaced or repainted “China Post green.” Probably fewer than four dozen pillar boxes in royal livery remain in Hong Kong.

The 2-cent Pan American stamp depicted in one of the Gallery's windows in the highly visible glass facade.

This month we look at the Stamps Around the Globe, where visitors can see material from the Museum’s extensive international holdings.

More than half of our collection consists of foreign stamps. Early on in our planning for the Gross Gallery, the museum’s audience research showed this would be one of the most popular spaces with visitors, so we have worked hard to make it memorable.

The exhibit called Treasures of the World is, in some ways, the international counterpart to the Gems of American Philately I wrote about in January. It presents the best pieces from our international collections, selected by curator Dan Piazza from more than 3 million stamps. These stamps and covers, from 24 different countries, tell incredible stories and connect with important events in world history. Some are very scarce or have errors made during production. A few represent “firsts” in the history of philately.

One impressive grouping consists of three examples from the Mauritius “Post Paid” issue of 1848 shown above. Visitors can see for themselves the different printing states as the soft copper plates wore down, and the well-known “Two Penoe” engraving error.

There is also a “Lady McLeod” on cover, named for a paddle steamer that carried mail around Trinidad. Only about 40 of these stamps are known to exist on their original covers.

Fifty more custom-engineered pullout frames will be installed in the international gallery, and will open with collections of Russia, Peru, and Napoleonic Italy as well as a few worldwide topical collections. These will change periodically, so that in time visitors will see a substantial portion of our worldwide collections.

Additional, smaller frames contain almost 800 stamps—one from every country in the world that has produced stamps, including many countries that no longer exist. Visitors will be invited to find the continents that interest them and look for stamps from their ancestral homelands or countries they have visited.

Before I go, I want to share with you another artist’s rendering of the Gross Gallery taken. Right before our eyes, this great new public facility is taking shape! Spring has arrived in Washington, where the cherry blossoms are making their brief annual appearance. Meanwhile, our Windows Into America project is taking shape. When it is completed, dozens of stamps will fill the gallery’s façade like stained glass for an entire city block. Here (above left) the 2-cent Pan American looks out onto Massachusetts Avenue and North Capitol Street.