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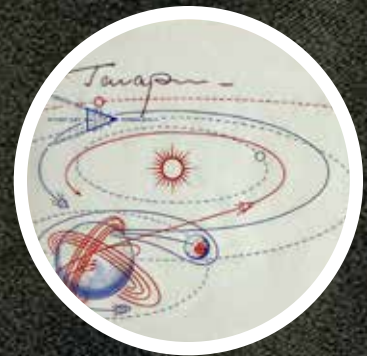
Audrey Hepburn

An Influential Autograph

To Maurice Chevalier
with warmest
admiration
Audrey Hepburn



Collecting Checks



Top 5 Riskiest
Space Autographs

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Top Five Riskiest Space Autographs

By: Steve Zarelli

If space autograph collecting were to have a Mount Rushmore, you would need to carve five heads into the side of the mountain. These are not necessarily the most important, popular, skilled or accomplished astronauts, but from an autograph perspective, these would be the top five desirable space autographs and the cornerstones of a space collection.



#1 - Yuri Gagarin - Example A; forgery

#1 - Yuri Gagarin - Example B; authentic

Space Autographs

If one were to judge purely on popularity, John Glenn and Alan Shepard would certainly make the top five. But, Glenn and Shepard autographic material is common and easily obtained at relatively low cost. If you were to judge based on skills or accomplishment, it would be hard to overlook Frank Borman or Gene Cernan. But like Glenn and Shepard, Cernan and Borman autographic material is in good supply. This top 5 list is composed of the most desirable and risky autographs of flown space travelers.

#1 – Yuri Gagarin (1934–1968)

Yuri Gagarin was the first human in space when his Vostok spacecraft orbited the earth of April 12, 1961.

Yuri Gagarin is also one of the most forged of any space traveler. In my opinion, 75% or higher of the Gagarin autographs I review are not authentic (*Example A; forgery*). Gagarin died behind the iron curtain in 1968, but he traveled frequently and made appearances after his flight. From all accounts, he was a good signer while in crowds, so authentic material exists, but it is heavily outweighed by the fakes.

One Russian dealer in particular has dumped thousands of mass-produced Gagarins on the market in the guise of “found collections” from fabricated Russian officials.

Be especially cautious of items with generic salutations such as “Happiness” or “Good luck!” Authentic examples rarely feature non-personalized sentiments. It was simply not the practice at the time. If Gagarin added a sentiment, it was almost always to a named individual—usually a party official or dignitary. Also, be wary of multi-signed photos and anything that also allegedly bears the signature of Sergei Korolev.

Authentic Gagarins are often found on postcard portraits, which you could expect to pay \$500 - \$700 for a military uniform pose (*Example B; authentic*). Spacesuit poses are less common and sell for a premium. In my estimation, the high volume of fakes significantly suppress the value of authentic material. If one could wave a magic wand and make all the fakes disappear, I suspect authentic Gagarins would be selling in the \$1,500 - \$2,000 range.



#2 - Neil Armstrong - Example C

#2 – Neil Armstrong (1930–2012)

Neil Armstrong is one of the most desirable autographs of any 20th century figure. His autograph is quite common because he signed freely for over 30 years—in person and through-the-mail. At the height of his fame in the 70s, it is reported

he received hundreds of autograph requests per week and signed them all (but usually one per “customer” as he used to say). I estimate there are tens of thousands (if not more) Armstrong autographs in circulation. (Example C on previous page; authentic).

Despite the fact there are so many in circulation, demand is higher still. Neil Armstrong is truly a global figure with global demand. Interest in Neil Armstrong’s autograph extends beyond just space collectors and crosses in to historical and general autograph collectors worldwide. There are very few figures who enjoy global demand that cuts across cultures, language and borders—and Neil Armstrong is among those few. Armstrong is highly forged and great caution is advised (Example D; Apollo 11 forgery). Be wary of any “cheap” Armstrong autographs because authentic examples never “go on sale.”

Expect to pay around \$750 for a signed cut, \$1,000 for a clean index card, \$1,300 for a personalized space suit portrait and \$3,500 - \$4,000 for an unpersonalized portrait. Unique poses or lunar surface images are uncommon and can fetch as high as \$20,000 for prime specimens.

#3 – Bill Anders

Bill Anders had only one spaceflight on Apollo 8, yet he is one of the most desirable and elusive astronaut autographs. Anders has been a reluctant signer since he joined NASA. At one time he would occasionally sign through the mail, but has not done so in many years. He sometimes

signs grudgingly at events, but stops if too many people ask and he has never signed commercially (Example E; authentic).

Anders seems to take delight in confounding collectors as well. He signs using many wildly different variants and intentionally signs in dark areas and where the signature will have the least contrast. Even examples signed for fellow NASA colleagues often have sloppy, poorly applied signatures in dark areas. On many

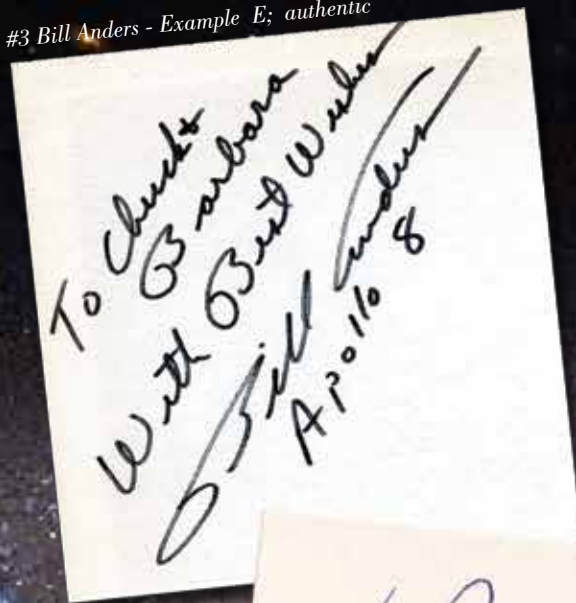
postal covers, Anders would sign in the area of the artwork.

Anders is highly forged and many Apollo 8 crew items bear a fake Anders. What I have seen over the years is collectors will buy an Anders signed photo or postal cover on the secondary market, and then add Borman and Lovell through commercial signings. Regrettably, the Anders that started it all is a fake, so someone

invested in an item that is fatally flawed (Example F; forgery).

Be wary of any Anders item that is carefully and neatly signed in an area of good contrast and looks “too good to be true.” Most portrait photos should be personalized. While cleanly signed crew items exist, they trade for a heavy premium. Expect to pay \$350 and up for a postal cover or personalized Bill Anders photo. An unpersonalized example with solid provenance and a clean signature could fetch \$1,000+.

#3 Bill Anders - Example E; authentic



Example D - Apollo 11 forgery

#3 Bill Anders - Example F; forgery



#4 Gus Grissom - Example H; forgery

#4 Gus Grissom - Example G; authentic



#4 – Gus Grissom (1926–1967)

Gus Grissom holds a special place in the hearts and minds of space collectors. Not only was he a member of the United States’s first group of astronauts—the Mercury 7—but he also tragically died in the 1967 Apollo 1 fire.

To this day, Gus Grissom is one of the most sought-after astronaut autographs (Example G; authentic). While he was a somewhat willing signer in his lifetime, he had a relatively small window of time to sign

autographs and died long before the era of commercial signings. Because of his popularity, relatively well-executed forgeries date back to the early 1970s—a time when astronaut forgeries were almost unheard of. Grissom can be a tough to authenticate because he had a great deal of natural variation, especially on the shape of the Gs. With Grissom, “feel and flow” are essential.

Most autographs should be on official NASA lithographs, postal covers or ad hoc items signed at events. Be wary of signed 8x10 glossy “action poses.” These items may have existed, but were not readily available in his lifetime. Often uncommon signed “action” glossies bear forgeries (Example H; forgery).



#5 Edward White - Exmpl J; forgery

Black and white 4x6 photos that Grissom sometimes sent for mail requests trade for around \$500 - \$600. Full size NASA lithograph portraits typically sell for \$1,000, and more for unpersonalized examples. Postal covers can be obtained in the \$300 range.

#5 – Edward White (1930–1967)

Like Gus Grissom, Ed White died tragically in the Apollo 1 fire on January 27, 1967. Just 18 months earlier, White was the first American to walk in space on the Gemini IV mission (*Example I; authentic*). White was a receptive signer in his lifetime and he graced many photos and postal covers with an elegant, flowing script. White had a relatively short time in the public spotlight—less than Grissom even—so demand outweighs supply. Because he signed



#5 Edward White - Example I; authentic

quickly and with a refined hand, his signature is a difficult target for forgers...but they try anyway.

Forgeries are often typified by a heavy, sluggish appearance (*Example J; forgery*) compared to the wispy and fast look of an authentic example. Fakes are most commonly found on postal covers simply because they are a much less expensive canvas for a forger compared to vintage NASA photos or lithographs. Gemini IV crew items are often found with a real McDivitt and a bad White. Expect to pay around \$350 for Edward White on a postal cover, \$700 for a personalized photo and \$1,400 for an unpersonalized example. Spacewalk photos and spacesuit poses sometimes command a premium over the NASA business suit portrait.

For the purpose of this article I focused on flown space travelers. If one was to include unflown astronauts and cosmonauts, there are many who would be much tougher and rare than the “Top 5” discussed here. But that is another article for another day!

Steve Zarelli, Zarelli Space Authentication, is a recognized authority in the field of astronaut autographs. His findings have been published in the definitive space collecting reference Relics of the Space Race, and he has contributed articles to the UACC's Pen & Quill magazine, Autograph Times magazine, and the UACC signature study Neil Armstrong: The Quest for His Autograph. Zarelli Space Authentication provides authentication