

Mineral Shows of 2017:
Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines, France, June

NOVELTIES OF SUMMER 2017 IN FRANCE

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1. Crystal group monument at the entrance of the Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines town.
Photo: Marina Romashova.

2. It was very hot! The shower on the street is one of the favorite places at the Show.
Photo: Rainer Bode.

This year, the show was blessed by very good, but also very hot weather, which prompted many visitors to search for quick refreshment in the small fountain in front of the main entrance of the show. Normally, such hot weather means heavy storms and lot of thunder during the last day of the show, but any flooding was this time avoided.

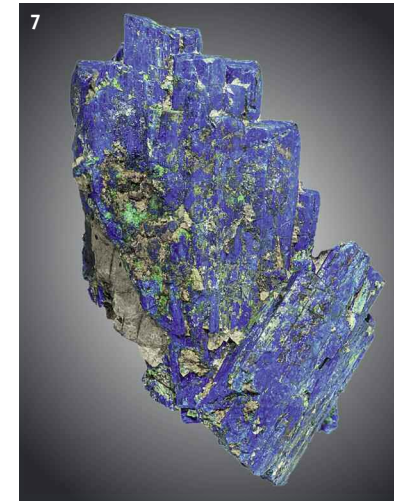


The most popular Gem and Mineral show in France, the 54th edition, took place as usual during the summer at Sainte-Marie aux Mines, a small city located on the slopes of the Vosges, the old mountain chain which marks the boundary between French- and German-speaking populations in France. A former center of mining activity which in the Middle Ages produced a significant part of the silver used in the Holy German Empire, Sainte Marie was originally populated by miners coming from Saxony, creating a German-speaking island in front of the linguistic boundary. The last mine closed down during the first years of World War II, but the town is proud of its mining past, with 100's of km of galleries or open pits at its close. During the annual gem and mineral show, that many rate as the third best in the world (after Tucson in February and Munich in October), the whole population participates in the organization, offering a wide choice of wines or traditional dishes from neighbouring Alsace. Despite all of the problems created by limited housing facilities, remote parking slots or tortuous access roads, the Sainte-Marie show retains a unique atmosphere which year after year attracts more dealers and visitors.

The very short guide lists about 1200 names (compare with 600 in Munich) with a large majority of dealers coming from France or neighbouring countries, especially Germany.

Some of the expositions were very interesting, especially those made by dedicated collectors who rarely have the opportunity to show their collecting results to the public. For instance, the faceted gemstones by Viktor Tuzlukov were of exceptional quality ("Blossoming of Life"), as well as the Alpine crystals presented by a group of crystal-hunters from Chamonix ("Tresors des cristalliers" = Treasures of crystal hunters), shown in "La Piscine" (Swimming-pool). In the neighbouring Tellure Museum outside of the main show, photographs of Ice Formation by the great photographer Albert Russ were also of great interest. To be honest I was disappointed by the "Prestige Exposition" this year due to the non-scientist concept of the general idea

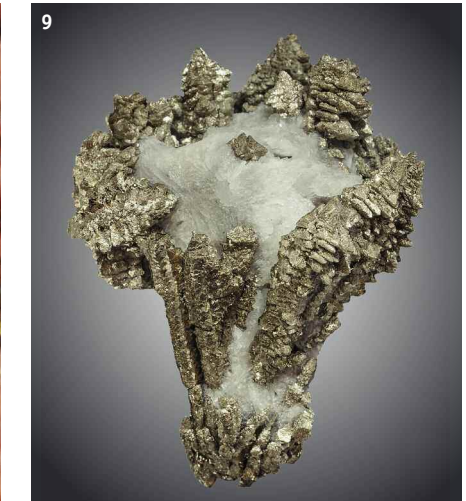
At a time where descriptive mineralogy has almost disappeared from most university programs, shows like Sainte Marie are almost the only place where anyone can observe hundreds of well crystallized minerals, and attract more and more educated circles. The week before the show a major meeting on fluid inclusions in minerals (ECROFI 2017) was held in Nancy, at a date especially chosen to allow the participants to visit Sainte-Marie (a special excursion was organized). You cannot have a good mineral collection if you have not a minimum education, for then you have the right to claim for a good scientific level to all aspects of the show, most of all the "Prestige Exhibition." Mineralogy is threaten by "pseudo-science," old beliefs from the time of obscurantism, and still blossoming is the space devoted to "Crystal and Health," Feng-Shui or other magic properties.



7. **Chalcostibite** with **azurite**.
Rar el Anz, Oued Cherrat, Chaouia-Ouardigha, Casablanca Prefecture, Casablanca-Settat Region, Morocco. 6.5 x 4.3 x 2.6 cm.
Specimen & Photo: www.fabreminerals.com.



8. **Gold** (crystal: 0.5 x 0.1 cm) on **erythrite**.
Bou Azzer District, Tazenakht, Ouarzazate Province, Souss-Massa-Draa Region, Morocco.
Specimen & Photo: www.fabreminerals.com.



9. **Pyrite** coating **marcasite** on **baryte**.
Bou Nahas Mine, Oumjrane mining area, Alnif, Tarhbalt, Er Rachidia Province, Meknes-Tafilalet Region, Morocco.
7.3 x 5.2 x 5.2 cm.
Specimen & Photo: www.fabreminerals.com.

the Ojuela Mine, Mexico. Crystal shapes were possibly slightly less idiomorphic than some of the specimens found in the past, but the bright yellow colour is more intense, quite contrasting with the dark shade of the matrix. According to Jordi Fabre it seems that this find was recent, in February-March of this year in a place called San Judas, in continuity with the Ojuela mine where other samples of legrandite had been found about one and half years ago. It seems that only one pocket has been found, bought by a single dealer.

Jordi Fabre has, as usual, extremely fine specimens from Spain and Portugal (Panasqueira). Located in front of the swimming pool, his stand might look not too spectacular at first sight. But he has a well hidden secret, an entire room that he has rented, which he opens for serious clients. There he showed me a few outstanding specimens, first of all deep blue, well crystallized fluorite on quartz from an exceptional pocket found in April this year in the Llamas quarry, Asturias, Spain. Called "Coquera del tubo" (idiomatic Spanish !) because of its shape (elongated tube), this pocket allowed enough space to the fluorite crystals to grow, reaching the unusual size (for this mine) of 2 cm. According to Jordi this pocket is the best ever found at this famous locality. Among many others, another sample that I found of interest was a world-class specimen of chalcostibite (CuSb_2), a pseudomorph after azurite, in nice crystals covered by a thin layer of azurite with incrustations of malachite. Found in the classic Rar el Anz mine (Casablanca District), Morocco, these crystals were found by non-local searchers, who managed to get access to old galleries and found a pocket containing extremely fresh crystals, better crystallized and less altered than anything found previously. These crystals seem to be the best chalcostibite so far, exceeding in quality those found in France (Saint Pons, Alpes de Haute Provence).

Morocco has provided other samples of interest, even if this country, traditionally a major mineral source in Sainte Marie, seemed to be less productive than in past years. Gold on erythrite was found in Bou Azzer, not in great pieces or a discovery per se surprising, as gold is part of the metals extracted from the mine after treatment. But it is the first time to my knowledge that gold appears as visible crystals, its yellow colour forming a nice contrast with the rose of erythrite. The mine of Bou Nahas, Er Rachidia Orovince, Meknes-Tafilalet region, famous for extraordinary bright and sharp radiating marcasite crystals, continues to produce interesting material. Specimens previously unknown appeared this year, columnar growths of octahedral pyrite coating twinned crystals of marcasite on tabular crystals of baryte. The provenance of these specimens was indicated as Imiter or Tinghir, but according to Jordi Fabre the pyrite-marcasite association and the typical whitish tabular baryte crystals clearly point to Bou Nahas.