



Jean de Sperati (1884 - 1957) at his home 'Claire de Lune' in Aix-les-Bains, France

Jean de Sperati was born 1884 in Pisa, Italy. However he spent a large part of his life in France. As a child in Pisa and later in France, Sperati began to collect stamps. He was particularly interested in the printing techniques, as well as photography which was in its infancy at that time. Relatives owned a postcard factory as well as a paper mill. Through this, Jean de Sperati was able to obtain copious knowledge of photography, print technology and chemicals. These formed the basis for his eventual self described career as a stamp "reproducer/artist".

His entry into the world stage of stamp collecting notoriety came when, on 24 February 1942, the French Customs randomly inspected an envelope containing "rare" stamps sent by Sperati to Mr. J. Ell, a stamp dealer in Lisbon, Portugal. The result of this action was that, on 7 April 1942,

the French Customs authorities prosecuted one Jean de Sperati for the undeclared export of 18 rare stamps with a market value of 60,500 to 78,000 francs (later revised to 234,000 francs).

Sperati's defense was that the stamps were "counterfeits" (though stopping short of admitting that he had produced them) which was refuted. Sperati was convicted of "Customs Fraud" based on the expert testimony of Dr Edmond Locard, a famous French criminologist, who compiled the report that concluded that the stamps were perfectly genuine. Sperati was convicted of "Customs Fraud" and sentenced to a year in prison, 10,000 francs fine and an additional 300,000 francs for criminal intentions.

In the subsequent appeal, it was determined that Sperati had been "reproducing" stamps since the beginning of the 20th century and in January 1948, based on evidence presented by Léon Dubus — a stamp collector and forgery expert, claimed that none of the stamps were authentic. He noted that these "reproductions" were of such a high standards that most passed the examination of the most notable of philatelic experts of the period.

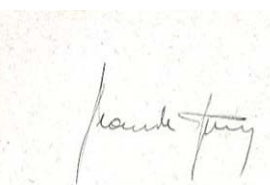
This outcome was a major embarrassment to the British Philatelic Association who had been certifying these "reproductions" as authentic stamps for the last 40+ years.

In 1953, The British Philatelic Association wanted to put an end to Sperati's "forgeries" once and for all. This actually was a good outcome for Sperati because new anti-forgery laws were being implemented that would eventually land in jail. In an unprecedented move, they made a deal with Sperati in which they bought all of his forgeries and printing blocks. It was with this \$40,000 "solution" to the problem that exposed the true scope of Sperati's lifetime work — Sperati "reproductions" included 566 stamps from over 100 countries.

His "reproductions" have become a collecting area in itself and are quite valuable. Sperati postage stamp are known to command quite a premium at the high powered auction houses when they surface — with more effort put into authentication a "genuine" Sperati than its original since these "original Sperati's" are now copied for distribution to the stamp collecting public.

To illustrate the quality of his work, the reproduction of the Confederate States of America 10¢ general issue (the second rarest stamp in the series) causes great consternation to CSA stamp experts when exposed in 1953 after the BPA published images of the Sperati collection compared to known originals.

As can be seen the "reproduction" was very well executed and only discernable when placed side-by-side — the Sperati has a "flat" look compared to a known "genuine" copy.



On a good number of his reproductions, it should be noted that he did sign them as any great artist is prone to do ...

