

The Making of Sperati Reproductions

This exhibit will illustrate and describe many of the ingenious techniques used by Jean De Sperati in manufacturing his stamp reproductions, or as he preferred, his "philatelic art." It is the story of how Sperati creating his art as well as his artifices.

Sperati was an exceptionally talented and prolific postage stamp forger. The British Philatelic Association (BPA) purchased his stock in 1953 and then published *The Work of Jean De Sperati* that described and illustrated 358 of his reproductions. In 2001, a second book, written by Robson Lowe and Carl Walske (*Sperati II*) was published by the Royal Philatelic Society that identified a further 102 reproductions.

Sperati wrote about his techniques in "La Technique" and although this exhibit uses information found in the English version of that work, it is focused primarily on the physical evidence. After his death in 1957, Sperati's daughter conveyed to Carl Walske much of his remaining production-related artifacts. Several of those items are incorporated in this exhibit including original unfinished items, working proofs, negatives, cancel tracings and celluloid clichés used to print the reproductions. Many of the items shown are not known outside of this collection.

In 1942 Sperati sent the approval sheet shown below to a stamp dealer in Portugal that was intercepted by French Customs. He was then prosecuted for exporting stamps of substantial value without declaring them. In his defense, Sperati claimed that they were all forgeries. When a French criminologist declared them to be genuine, Sperati produced an identical set of the stamps. He was finally acquitted of the smuggling charge by the court in Chambéry in 1948.



original sheet of forgeries that was confiscated in 1942, each item is marked "Copie" on back the five perforated stamps are printed on paper from which a genuine stamp design has been removed

Decoloring Genuine Stamps

For his raw material Sperati often used genuine, common stamps with the desired features. These included the proper perforations, watermarks and correct cancels for the period. After applying protective coatings to the genuine cancel, and if needed, to the gum, Sperati chemically treated the stamps to remove the design before printing his new design.



Australia 1d raw stamps, ex Sperati stockbook



£2 finished reproductions



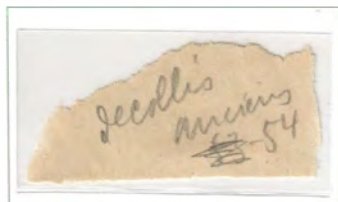
Sweden decolored stamps with postmarks retained



British decolored stamp retained "SPECIMEN" retained Crown CA watermark retained original gum retained perforations



Sweden finished reproductions, genuine cancels retained
3s yellow error of color at right



Sperati note as 1854 paper and cancels, Spain decolored stamps with cancels retained



Spain 1854 issue finished reproductions with genuine paper and cancels

Genuine Overprints Retained

In a reversal of the usual forged overprint applied to genuine stamps, Sperati was able to preserve the genuine overprints on stamps during his decoloring process. He then printed his reproduction stamp designs onto the stamps.



Ceylon genuine decolored stamps with cancels and different original surcharges retained
Sperati replaced the washed design with his reproduction of Ceylon 4c



Ceylon genuine decolored stamps with cancels and 5c surcharges retained

Sperati replaced the washed design with his reproduction of Ceylon 24c

Ceylon 24c proofs, working proof is dated January 18, 1945



Gibraltar genuine decolored stamp with cancel and overprint retained
Sperati replaced the washed design with his reproduction of Bermuda 1s
proof of Bermuda 1s is dated June 21, 1915

Contact Photo Lithography

The quality of Sperati's reproductions is in large part the result of his method of making his master negatives. It was from these masters, which he termed "matrices," that his celluloid printing clichés were made. Sperati's method entailed rendering transparent the genuine stamp model before using it to directly contact the film negative. After several additional steps, he was able to have a master negative from which his celluloid printing clichés could be produced. The prints were made on a small hand-cranked roller press.



Painted model position "ED"



backlit image →



positions "PI" and "JL"



positions "LK" and "KJ"

Sperati's Great Britain model for capturing corner lettering for an unreported position is above left. His master matrix used for making clichés for position "PI" is at center. The finished reproductions representing all the known positions are at right. These are decolored genuine stamps with cancels retained.



Saxony 1850 issue 3pf retouched cliché and two different final printing clichés

Static Cancels

When Sperati could not find an unused stamp model, he resorted to the use of static cancels which were printed in a fixed position. When he photographed his used stamp model he used different gel filters. One was needed to highlight the cancel and another to subtract the cancel. To print, he used two clichés made from those images overlaid exactly so the cancel covered the design flaws.



Newfoundland exposure trials reducing cancel, stamp print with void, finished reproduction with cancel



Naples exposure trial with reduced cancel, proof of design with voids, finished reproduction



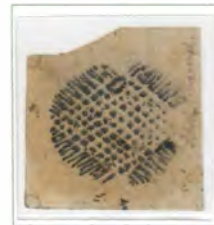
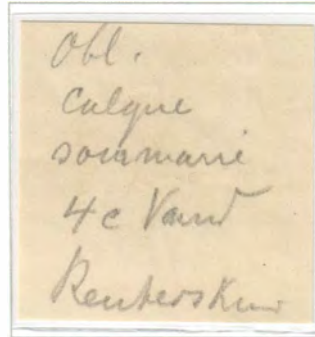
Saxony proof of design showing voids, proof of the removed cancel, finished reproduction

Variable Cancels

Like his stamps, Sperati printed his cancels by contact photo-lithography. He first traced cancels he wanted to reproduce, painted over the pencil tracing with black ink, made the tracing paper transparent chemically and made a photograph. He reproduced his master negative to the celluloid clichés he needed for printing and was then able to print the cancel in various positions.



pencil tracing of rosette for 4c "Vaud" stamp and Sperati's filing note: "Reuterskiöld obl."



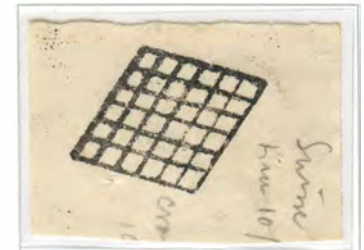
pencil tracing over-painted Buenos Aires reproduction



Geneva rosette cliché



Naples "ANNULLATO" cliché reproduction with printed cancel



proofs of grid cancel



4c "Vaud" covers
Geneva rosette and grid
all markings on these were
printed by Sperati



Genuine Embossing Retained

Italy and States fakes made with crude embossed heads are common. Instead, Sperati made his reproductions by preserving the genuine embossed heads and cancels when he decolored the genuine stamps. He then printed his forged frames inverted to the genuine embossed heads.



Naples 2g frame color proofs and finished reproduction with original head and postmark retained



Sardinia frame color proofs for the 5c (in color of the 40c), 10c shades and 80c



Sardinia set of finished reproductions with inverted frames substituted for the genuine



Italy 15c frame pairs with minor differences and finished reproductions, one with part of second frame

Genuine Embossing Retained

On the letters below all the markings are genuine. Sperati removed the original stamps and decolored them preserving the embossed heads and cancels. He then printed his forged frames onto the stamps, touched up the postmarks and replaced on the original letters.



Sperati reproductions of Sardinia 5c, 10c and 15c inverted frame varieties on original letters
5c pair at top is made from his type A and type C frames se-tenant, postmarks are genuine

Replacement Value Tablet

For his reproduction of the Poste Locale 4c stamp, Sperati employed the expedient solution of using a 5c Poste Locale model and replacing the value tablet. He replaced the 5c value tablet with a 4c tablet made from the tracing below. He also made a new background for the cross.



Sperati's 5c proof, ink tracing of 4c value tablet and protective encasements dated October 1931



reproductions of the 5c and the 4c, type A, derived from the same frame cliché but with new value tablet



4c exposure trial, composite proof and proof of red background only, all of a revised type, type B



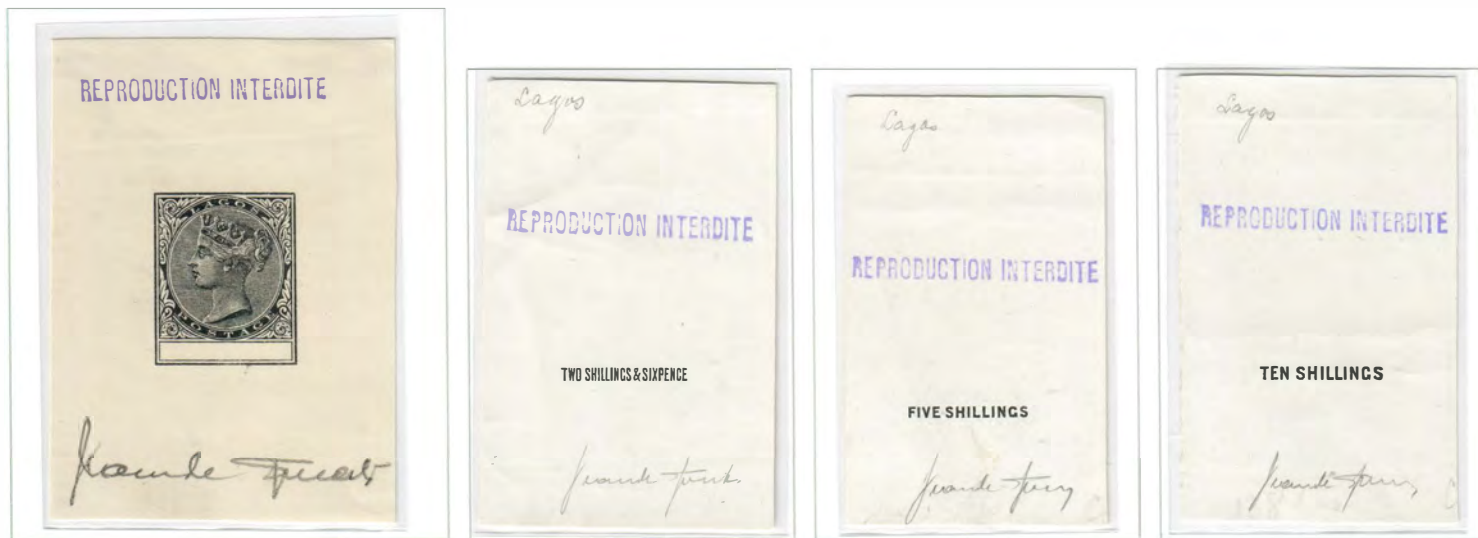
4c finished reproductions, type B

Key and Duty Clichés

Sperati employed the use of multiple clichés to produce several of his reproductions where a single main design was used for multiple denominations. This process mimicked the use of key plates for the main design and duty plates for the different value tablets by the original stamp printers. It also allowed subtle variations in placement.



Lagos set of finished reproductions



Lagos proofs of key cliché and of the three duty clichés with the different denominations



Lagos composite proofs, each printed from two clichés, the key cliché and a duty cliché

Engraved Stamps

Sperati perfected a very convincing method to imitate engraved stamps. He used multiple exposures of his model onto a master negative using both sides of a glass plate. The reproductions, such as those below, give a very convincing perception of depth of line.



New York City 5¢ working proof, United States 1847 issue 10¢ working proof and unused examples



Brazil 1843 issue 60r proof and two finished reproductions with forged cancels



Argentina 1910 issue 10p and 20p finished reproductions

Multiples

An effective stratagem employed by Sperati was to create multiples that appear to be from different plate positions. His multiples that used a single cliché are somewhat less deceptive.



Buenos Aires tête-bêche pair made from different clichés
Switzerland pairs made from different clichés, one pair with and one without frame to cross



Switzerland strips made from type A-B-C clichés, with and without frame to cross



Bremen 5sg blocks from four different clichés, types B-C / D-E, right block split before cancels added



Bavaria tête-bêche reproductions made from a single cliché printed multiple times

Forged Covers

Sperati was not satisfied making fake covers by simply replacing genuine stamps with reproductions. Instead, he made his covers and fragments with all, or most, of the markings printed and with his reproduction stamps. The forged trimmings often include sender cachets, origin and transit postmarks and even wax seals on the reverse.



Sperati added his France 1f tête-bêche pair forgery to this folded cover of his own making the cancels, sender's cachet, red "P.D" as well as all postmarks were his printed additions



Naples reproduction, forged cancel and sender's cachet



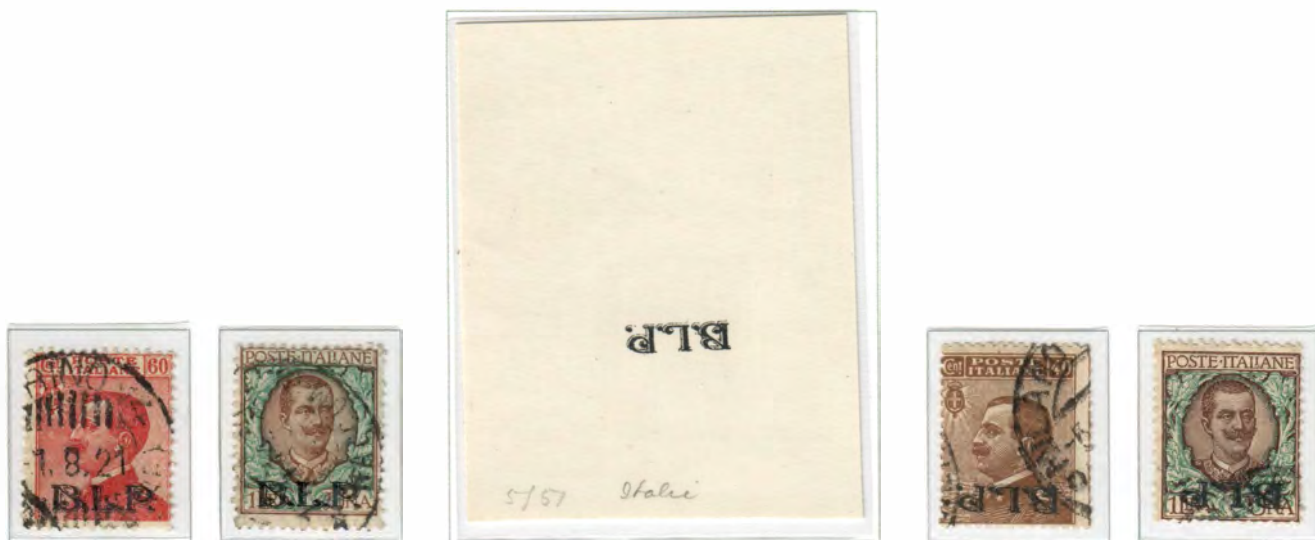
4c "Vaud" pair, forged cancels, part cachet and part postmark



City Despatch, forged cancel and part postmark

Forged Overprints

Although adding counterfeit overprints to genuine stamps was a common method employed by forgers, it was rarely used by Sperati. His technique superbly mimicked typographed overprints. The examples below were not recognized as forgeries until 2001. For Benin, Sperati forged a rare variety of a handstamped overprint that made comparison with genuine difficult. For Italy, he forged the typographed "B.L.P." semi-postal overprints including inverts.



Italy 1922 "B.L.P." semi-postal overprints with forged cancels, Sperati proof dated May 1951



Benin 1892 issue overprints, dropped "B" variety, four in black plus one in blue



proofs of Sperati "BENIN" overprints in black and in blue, dated May 1943

Forged Embossing

One of Sperati's most sophisticated reproductions was of an 1845 Basle dove. It required the use of three printing clichés plus an embossing. It is also the only forged embossing he did. Sperati's written plans for its manufacture survive as well as two glass plate negatives. One finished example was delivered to a client in the 1950s but has not been seen since.



essay prints of full design: highlighted letter in dove's beak, final approved and of rectified image



photo print

protected cliché for black

protected cliché and proof for blue cross hatching these are dated April 1953



painted essay to highlight the dove boss lines, dated July 1953, and three trial impressions

Adapting a Model

When faced with the task of making an imperforate stamp when the only models available were perforated stamps, Sperati proceeded as usual with the perforated model and painted in the missing portions of the design frames to complete. A rarely used process.



British Columbia exposure trial showing perforations, imperforate reproduction



Canada trial exposure and proof on paper showing perforations, no reproduction is known

Altering a Specimen Overprint

The Canada 12d stamp at bottom was made by Sperati as a custom, special order in 1953. It was made from a genuine 12d "SPECIMEN" overprinted stamp by removing the overprint. He also manipulated the paper so that it now has the correct vertical laid lines. The cancel is forged. This is the only known example and the only case of Sperati using this technique.



genuine Canada 12d plate proof pair on india paper with "SPECIMEN" overprint the impression of the genuine stamp is much more similar to the Sperati reproduction below



Canada 12d reproduction made by altering a genuine "SPECIMEN" overprinted stamp