

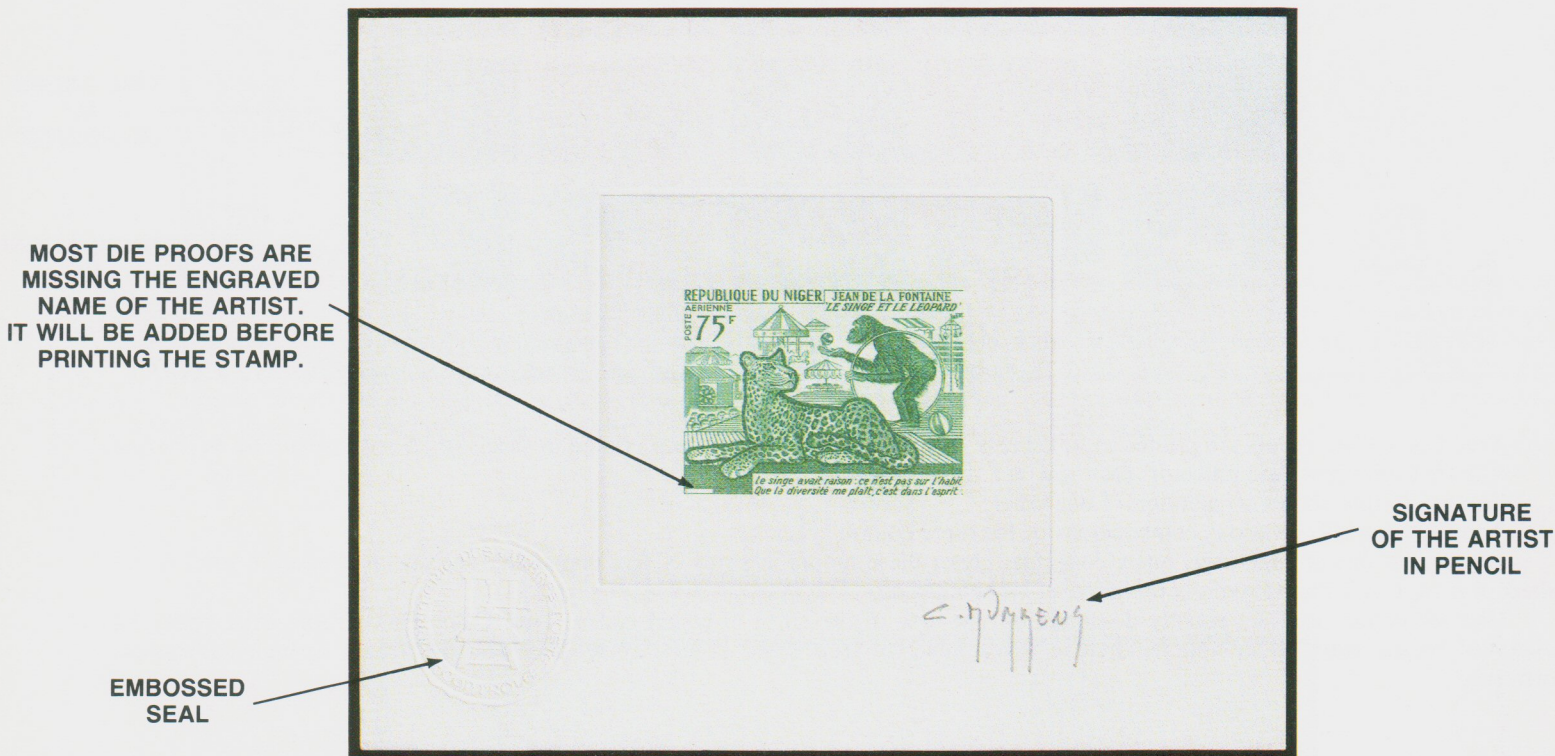
AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERN PROOFS OF THE FRENCH AREA

The wide variety of French Proofs has long been a source of fascination, yet puzzlement, to most stamp collectors and even many dealers. Among the reasons for their desirability are their aesthetic beauty and their scarcity. With printing quantities as low as 20—and sometimes even 5—French Proofs may be a unique enhancement to the album pages of both topical and country collections, enabling many collectors to win awards in exhibitions. In an effort to offer clarification to the philatelic world, ~~FRANCIS & TAYLOR~~ presents this brochure describing modern Proofs of the French Area. We hope their distinctive beauty will become apparent from the illustrations and explanations offered.

An elementary understanding of printing methods is necessary to better comprehend French Proofs.

Generally, two printing processes are used for stamps of France and its former colonies: Heliogravure and Engraving. For each issue, the French Postal Administration contracts an artist to prepare an original drawing or painting. For Heliogravure issues, the printing plate is produced by a photographic process from this drawing. The engraving process, on the other hand, requires the talents of an engraver—often the same artist who created the drawing—to reproduce the original design on a small block of special, soft steel called a Die. The Die is then hardened and will be used to produce the printing plate.

DIE PROOFS — The prints made from the Die are called Die Proofs.



Since 1956, Die Proofs have been made and their production has been strictly controlled by the government stamp printery. The quantity produced is limited to about twenty copies. They are made by hand press from the unhardened Die on a piece of thick, high-quality paper. Each Die Proof bears an embossed administrative control seal which makes reproduction virtually impossible.

Before 1956, Die Proofs usually were produced by the artist himself. They are, therefore, also known as "Artist's Proofs." Less control was exercised, and, although most Artist's Proofs are quite scarce, in some instances larger quantities were made.

Die Proofs are printed in various solid colors—mostly black—and usually bear the artist's signature in pencil.

SEPIA PRINTER'S DIE PROOFS

These are the scarcest proofs printed by France. Discontinued in the early 1960's, they were made by the government stamp printery from the unhardened Die to detect minute defects that could cause problems during the printing process.

Produced only in one color—sepia—usually only



three to five were printed; one ultimately going to the official Archives, one to the Postal Museum, and the rest left for the philatelic world. If a defect were found, the Die was retouched and another set of proofs prepared. ~~This process was repeated until the Die was faultless and ready to be hardened.~~

TRIAL COLOR PLATE PROOFS

The color selection is the next stage of the stamp production process. Since the 1950's, most issues of France and its former colonies have been printed in a combination of three colors; since the 1960's, some issues have contained as many as six colors. Trial Color Plate Proofs are prepared to enable the French Postal Administration to choose among a number of colors in various combinations.



Trial Color Plate Proofs are printed in full sheets. The arrangement for a stamp printed in sheets of 25 will usually be as follows:
 The first three rows are unicolor; each row is a different color.
 The fourth row shows a repetition of one color.
 The fifth row shows various combinations of the three colors.

Because of this arrangement, many collectors prefer these proofs in strips of five containing one stamp from each row. A full sheet of Trial Color Plate Proofs is the jewel of any collection.

The ink colors used are usually described on one side of the sheet in pencil codes. Trial Color Plate Proofs exist solely for engraved issues. Only about four hundred to seven hundred Trial Color Proofs are released and distributed to high government officials.

TRIAL COLOR DIE PROOFS



Before the days of Trial Color Plate Proofs, Trial Color Die Proofs were prepared with the hardened Die. Usually from eight to ten different solid colors were tested and only five to ten copies were printed for each color. The ink color is often described in the lower right corner in pencil code numbers. For some issues of the 1950's, both Trial Color Plate Proofs and Trial Color Die Proofs exist.

DELUXE SHEETS



Deluxe Sheets are ungummed sheets on which the stamp is printed in the center in the issued colors. Since 1949, their usual size has been about four to five inches. Almost all Deluxe Sheets for France and a large majority of Deluxe Sheets for the former French colonies have been printed by the government stamp printery. These bear its name, "Atelier de Fabrication des Timbres-Poste. PARIS" or other similar names and until 1967 had control punches at the bottom.

Deluxe Sheets for Heliogravure issues were always, until 1966 and still often after this date, printed by private companies such as "Helio Vaugirard," "So Ge Im" or "Delrieu." Deluxe Sheets are given to high government officials.

COMPOUND DELUXE SHEETS



When stamps are issued in sets on the same date or on the same topic at different but close dates, they are sometimes printed on the same sheet to form a Compound Deluxe Sheet. Compound Deluxe Sheets, also called Collective Deluxe Sheets, are much scarcer than regular Deluxe Sheets as only about twenty-five of each issue exist. Until 1940, some Deluxe Sheets were issued only in compound format, and although they are now very rare more than twenty-five copies were printed.

GUMMED AND PERFORATED DELUXE SHEETS



From 1946 to 1959, some Deluxe Sheets—mostly Compound Deluxe Sheets—were issued on gummed paper. They are practically all perforated and are extremely scarce. Only about twenty or fewer of each issue were prepared.

IMPERFORATES

During the printing process, a number of the first sheets are left without perforations. For French issues, about 1,000 stamps are left imperforated (twenty sheets of fifty or forty sheets of twenty-five) or 2,000 for small-sized stamps (twenty sheets of 100). Since 1941, these Imperforates have been distributed to high government officials.

Imperforates can be collected in different forms.

SPECIAL OFFER

Yes, I am very interested in the fascinating Proofs of the French Area.

Please send me

—Price lists

—Approvals (with no obligation except to return unwanted merchandise within two weeks and pay return postage)

On the following:

—Countries:

—Topics:

NAME:

ADDRESS:



Blocks of four

Some collectors may even want full sheets.



Single



Single with margin called "Margin Copy"



Pair

Important: Due to the method of distribution of French Proofs, it is understandable that a smaller number than distributed really appears on the market. High government officials may not be conscious of their value and sometimes they are given to friends or relatives, collectors and non-collectors, while some will even be lost or destroyed. Some officials will not sell them for ethical reasons. Proofs are also kept in official archives and museums.

Note on printed quantities: We have made our best efforts to provide you with accurate figures. But often no official figures were released by the French Postal Administration and we had to rely on the opinions of highly-regarded specialists in France and the USA with years of experience in the field of French Proofs.