

## Other French Engravers Part 2

To recap: In our relentless quest to find The World's Prettiest Stamp, we are spending some time with the designers and engravers who produced France's remarkable landscape stamps. Starting in the 1930s, French postal authorities assembled a team of expert engravers, trained at prestigious institutions like the Ecole des Beaux Arts and Ecole Estienne. These busy engravers took time to produce some of France's most beautiful stamps — along with hundreds more for other francophone nations. Since our scope is limited to landscape stamps, I'll select a few examples from a number of engravers in a kind of hit-or-miss effort to flag the World's Prettiest Stamp. Well, at least it will be fun trying. So far we've enjoyed profiles and portfolios from some of the pioneers in French landscape stamps. There are more names on the list, so let's get back to it.

### Pierre Munier 1889-1962

Sorry I don't have a photo of this gent, not even just posing like the others over his drawing table. I searched the web and came up empty. Hey, I'm not going to obsess over it. I do love Pierre Munier's landscape engravings, so let's get acquainted with the artist and his work. Instead of a portrait, I'll settle for this exquisite landscape of Nice, the city on the Riviera (below). The landscape is artfully framed by the trees, the scene somehow even more vivid because it is presented in a single color — deep ultramarine. I try to imagine the stamp in two or more colors — say, green foliage, tan hills — and I really can't see it. It might not be the world's prettiest stamp, but there's no improving on it.



Nice 1955

Born in Paris, Paul Munier was engraving by the age of 13. Thanks to his talent and mentors like the painter Huet and engraving teacher Jules Jacquet, he made his way through the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Awarded numerous prizes, the young prodigy missed out on the coveted Prix de Rome because he had married early — the prize was reserved for bachelors. He was creating stamps by 1907, before he was 20 — anonymously, it seems. His biographer lists Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Portugal, Czechoslovakia, Persia, Armenia and Belgium as countries whose stamps “he is said to have been responsible for ...”

Munier’s first French stamps did not come until the 1930s, after visionary Culture minister Jean Mistler issued his call for engravers and landscape stamps. There followed a productive career for Munier that included this sampling of beautifully rendered landscapes. He also created stamps for the francophone diaspora.

In an interview from 1954, Munier displayed a flinty personality. He

criticized the French Post for holding competitions, pitting engravers against each other. He argued that the PTT knows its artists, their particular strengths, and can assign designers and engravers without making them fight it out. You can hear Munier’s voice (or is it the translator’s?) driving home his point: “Being chosen to make a design would also encourage the artist much more to come up trumps.”



Gulf of Ajaccio 1954



Elysees Palace Paris 1957





Viaduct Chaumont Haute Marne 1960



Moissac 1963

## Pierre Gandon 1899-1990

The phone call came in August 1944: Gen. de Gaulle is coming to Paris! Tomorrow morning! He's going to choose the new design for the French Marianne definitive! "There are four of you in the frame: Cheffer, Mazelin, Piel and you," said the head of French Post. "Better get a design ready. Make haste, make haste!"

I guess that's what Munier was complaining about — the competition. Gandon stayed up all night in his bomb-



ravaged studio at Place de Furstenberg in Paris. He won that particular competition as part of his glorious, 50-year career designing stamps for France and



Chateau Bontemps, Arbois Jura 1951





St. Theobald's Church, Thann 1961

francophone territories. He is credited with more than 350 French stamps and double that number for francophone colonies and nations.

(NOTE: Gandon also produced stamps for Vichy France, and was briefly “blacklisted” after WWII. He was the only one singled out in this way, though other engravers also served the Vichy regime. Gandon soon was back in everyone’s good graces, winning the Grand Prix de l’Art Philatelique four time in its first 10 years of existence; he designed no fewer than three definitive “Mariannes.”)

Gandon was born in the Marne Valley town of L’Hay-des Roses — with one built-in

advantage: His father Gaston was a stamp engraver at the Institut de gravure in Paris. Pierre attended the right schools — Ecole Estienne, Ecole des Beaux Arts — and won the Prix de Rome in 1921.



Here FYI is the “Gandon Marianne” that won the competition in 1944. Writes the biographer: “The portrayal of this Marianne, with her slightly haggard look and bags under her eyes, was not to everyone’s taste and came in from some criticism. But Gandon always defended her, saying it was a portrait of someone emerging from the devastation of war.”





Now let's take a moment to contemplate a pair of masterpieces by Pierre Gandon.



Ile de la Cite, Paris 1947

This stunning airmail issue from 1947 marked the congress of the Universal Postal Union in Paris. According to Gandon's biographer: "That seagull was nearly Gandon's undoing, because the minister in charge of postal matters would not believe that there were seagulls in Paris. Gandon had to take the man up to the very spot from where he had designed his stamp to prove that they really flew that far inland, before he was allowed to proceed with his design!"

Two years later, Gandon designed and engraved this beautiful view of Paris for a stamp marking another conference. Could it be that he was still thinking of that seagull and the trouble it caused when he decided to put swallows into the frame?



Alexander III Bridge and Petit Palais, Paris 1949



## Robert Cami 1900-1975

Born New Year's Day 1900, Robert Cami worked his way through evening classes in art school in Bordeaux. A study grant brought him to Paris, where he studied under Lucian Simon at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. His engraving teacher was Watner. He won the Prix de Rome in 1928.



Before turning to stamps, Cami had a successful career as an artist and book illustrator, specializing in landscapes and nudes. His work is held in museums in France and abroad (Chicago). He began teaching in Bordeaux, and in 1945 was named professor of engraving at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris.

His biographer said Cami's favorite engraved art form was the ex libris bookplate!



Uzerche 1955

It was only in the 1950s that Cami began designing and engraving stamps, and he naturally gravitated to the landscapes of the year



Chateau de Valencay Indre 1957



Kerrata Gorge, Algeria 1960



Tourism series. What you see here is a sampling of the works of singular beauty he produced.

Some of his stamps were very popular. The stately yet modern view of Laon cathedral (right) was in such demand, more than 30 million copies were printed.



Laon cathedral 1960



Cote d'Azur 1963

**TO BE CONTINUED**