

Other French Engravers Part 3 ... and a big discovery!

To recap: 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 artists 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, we can 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.

Rene Cottet 1902-1992

Born in Paris, he spent four years at the Ecole Estienne, where he was a student of engraver Antoine Deszarrois. By 1934 he was himself a teacher, and helped train ensuing generations of stamp engravers at the Ecole Estienne, including Yves Beaujard and Claude Andreotto.

About his prowess as a stamp engraver there can be little doubt — though I don't see the Prix de Rome on his *vita*. As far as I'm concerned, his work is all the resume he needs.

Cottet started making stamps for French territories in 1937, and for France after 1941 —

though he did little work during the Vichy era. He listed his favorite subjects as landscapes, portraits and animals.

And what landscapes he created! As an artist, he displayed deceptive simplicity, while demonstrating subtle mastery of form, composition, light and color. His country scenes radiate



Meuse river valley Ardennes 1949



Lourdes 1954

tranquil charm, embodied in the full forms and muted edges of his drawing. I was entranced by the ancient welcome of the 800-year-old Abbey gate at Jumieges (right). I marveled at the glowing light and soaring lines of the cathedral at Rouen (below left). As for the tunnel under Mont Blanc (lower right) — what a colorful spectacle!



Abbey ruins, Jumiege 1954



Rouen cathedral 1957



Road/tunnel under Mont Blanc 1965

You may notice I have not yet referred to the other stamp shown above — the one of Lourdes. That's because I need to say a bit more about this



marvelous artifact.

Over the years I have come upon this stamp in my collection. Sometimes I would just page past it, other times pause for a moment. But I never catch sight of it without a feeling of ... comfort and contentment. It's not a valuable stamp, but everything about it feels ... perfect: light balances dark; blue and green hues harmonize; the gaze circles pleasingly from trees at left, past hill and village, to mountain pierced by steeple, to glistening water under the cedar. I am not a pilgrim seeking the healing springs of Lourdes' Grotto of the Apparitions; I am not a Catholic; yet I can't ignore the holy light in this stamp. Its rays spread joyfully over the peaceful scene, bathing church and buildings in creamy white. Trees glow at their edges. Pooled water reflects the light. The overall effect is of unity between humanity, nature and the divine.

I believe we are looking at one of the most beautiful stamps in the world. And it only costs a buck.



Jean Pheulpin
1907-1991



Cheverny chateau 1954

Now that we have found what I consider a genuine candidate for World's Most Beautiful Stamp (see above), let us consider another outstanding French stamp engraver and enjoy some of his work. Who knows? We may get lucky again.

Jean Pheulpin was fortunate in his father. The industrialist from Valentigney in the Doubs district recognized his son's love of art and sent him for training at Boule, the College for Applied Arts in Paris, where he learned engraving. There were five more years at the Ecole des Beaux Arts where he was taught by engraver Antoine Dezarrois, whose pupils included Cheffer, Gandon and Piel.

Pheulpin's landscapes are notable for their clean lines and vivid colors. His dramatic view of Calais City Hall (below right) includes Rodin's classic statue, The Burghers of Calais. These 14th century citizens have been honored in history — and myth — for interceding with English King Edward III to end a siege during the Hundred Years



Le Quesnoy 1957



Sully-sur-Loire chateau 1961



Calais — City Hall and Rodin sculpture 1961



Illuminated ramparts Vannes 1962

also engraved most of the stamps of francophone Laos — beautiful stamps, to be sure, but not on-topic when we are considering French landscape stamps!

I will only mention that his famous Laotian elephants set, issued in 1958, won the Grand Prix de l'Art Philatelique.

Clearly Pheulpin was a hard worker and loved his work, engraving some 650 stamps in a long career that included lots of stamps for francophone territories and nations. His biographer wrote: "Pheulpin did concede engraving was often very hard work: peering constantly through microscopic magnifiers, creating lines which had to be fine, compact and deep enough to be still visible after having been copied several times; from master die to transfer roller, from roller to printing plate and from plate to stamp paper."

He said he had to put in 80-hour work weeks to complete one assignment. *Mon pauvre!*

War.

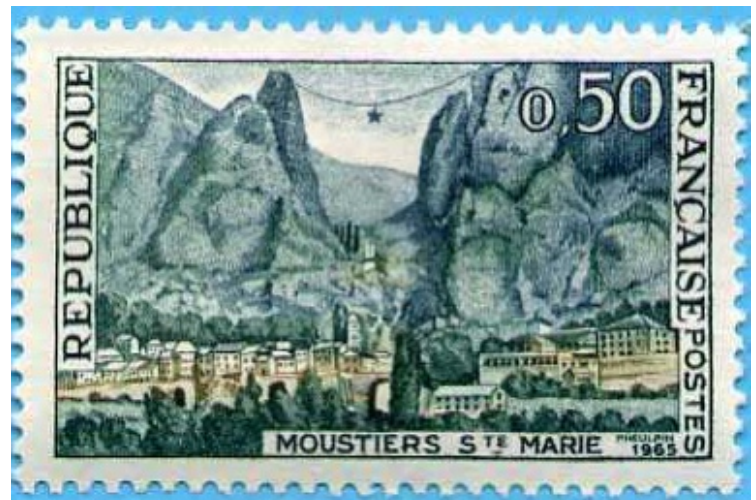
Pheulpin taught art even as he created stamps, and his students would tease him about his latest issue on sale at the post office window. He enjoyed creating portraits as well as landscape stamps, and was a regular contributor through the 1950s and 1960s. During those decades he



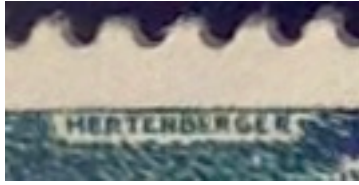
OK, OK, here is one of Pheulpin's Grand Prix Laotian elephant stamps. Very pretty, but it's not a French landscape stamp. If we must consider it, let us do so elsewhere.



Vittelet 1963



Moustiers Ste. Marie 1965



Claude Hertenberger 1912-2002



First off, what's with the name? Turns out the Hertenbergers came from Alsace, the hotly contested territory that went back and forth

between France and Germany. After one German occupation too many, the Hertenbergers "emigrated" to France, where Claude was born. His Alsatian name captures the hybrid quality of some border regions of both countries.

The ambitious young artist/engraver — at 20 he said he wanted to "become Rembrandt" — trained for a brilliant career, studying at the Sorbonne and winning the Prix de Rome in 1942. Note the date. Instead of enjoying years of work and study at the Villa Medici in Italy, Hertenberger was arrested and held prisoner by the Gestapo for nearly four years.

Fortunately Hertenberger survived, and went on to a productive career as an artist, sometimes working in mixed media on a monumental scale. (He designed a giant astronomical clock for Orly airport in Paris.) Among his awards are the Ordre National de Merite and the Legion d'Honneur.

Hertenberger was credited with more than 200 stamps. The two illustrated here

showcase his engraving artistry.



Chateau d'Amboise 1963



Cilaos church, Reunion 1960

TO BE CONTINUED