

When is a forgery not a forgery?

My question may seem rather strange, surely a genuine stamp is always genuine and a copy of the genuine is always a forgery. Well not quite! I have been shown some examples of stamps that are no more than very good “pictures” or illustrations of genuine stamps. The answer therefore to my question is:- ‘When the forgery is no more than a picture or illustration of a stamp’.

Many pictures and illustrations of stamps are available in modern auction catalogues and in some of the better stamp catalogues, they are wonderfully reproduced but if they were cut out and mounted on an album page they would not suddenly become “forgeries”. I cannot remember when the U.S. law changed that required the illustrations to have a line across them but now, all is reproduced in living colour. Quite clearly a forgery is not a forgery if it is simply an illustration.

The fraud occurs when someone attempts to pass the “picture” as a genuine stamp or the forgery as a Philatelic forgery of a stamp.

Allow me to place a little background information before you.

At a very recent meeting of the Portuguese Philatelic Society in England, a member from America showed me some sheets of Mozambique stamps that had been scanned, multiplied and colour photocopied upon A4 sheets of a nice crisp, wove, gummed paper. The “stamps” were imperforate and of a good lifelike colour. With the “stamps” my friend had included some sheets of e-mail correspondence. The sheets of “stamps” that I was shown were:-

- 1876 Mozambique crown 200 reis in orange (C.E. 8) (SC 13)
- (SG 8) in an impossible imperf sheet of 63. (Issued in panes of 28).
- 1915 Mozambique Carlos (Neto) surcharged 130 reis on 200
- reis with Local “Republica”, also in an impossible sheet of 54. (Issued in panes of 28) (C.E. 176) (SC 198) (SG 222).
- 1915 Mozambique Carlos (Mouchon) 50 reis with “Provisiorio”
- and Lisbon “Republica” overprint (C.E. 187); (SC 207) (SG 226). Sheet of 54, issued in pane of 28.
- 1924 Postage Due 2½ reis Ceres surcharged 20c. (C.E. 45) (SC J47) (SG D47).

S.E. refers to the Afinsa 2002 Selos Postais catalogue, SC to Scott and SG to Gibbons.

As mentioned with the above examples my friend gave me the e-mail correspondence, names have been omitted but the contents of the text was as follows:-

'While forgeries being offered through on-line auctions such as eBay have been a problem from the start, there is a dangerous type of manufactured "forgery" that is now being offered with great regularity.

One example is the offering of the seller "atdinvest". This seller is offering a world-wide range of material, including many Scandinavian items. However, these appear not to be old forgeries; these seem newly made. The illustrations give me the impression that these have been made on a computer and printed out on a colour laser printer'.

(A comment on the removal of negative feedback on the site is omitted here).

'In a new twist, starting after lots with 26 September closing dates, the seller has switched to "private" auction listings that prevent you or I from seeing anything about the bidding action. (I would not like to be eBay and have to defend my complicity in this!). (I have been told that "private" auctions are often used when selling "adult" items).

The "forgeries offered by this seller are typically in large blocks; for example 20 or more in a block or sheet. They are colour printed and are NOT perforated.



This is a typical description by the seller, I quote:

Extraordinary forgery sheet to be used as reference material.

THE GREATEST FORGERIES THAT HAVE EVER BEEN OFFERED. THE FINAL SOURCE FOR TRUE FORGERIES. ALWAYS A MASTERPIECE ART FORGERY FOR THE KNOWLEDGEABLE COLLECTOR. THESE ARE PHILATELIC FORGERIES WITH NO POSTAL OR MONETARY VALUE.

This sellers products all seem to have a starting price of \$3.99. What is most amazing is not only that most of the lots are selling, but some of them have sold at prices of up to \$30, \$40, or even \$50. If it is true that these are printed out on demand using a laser printer, this seller has

created a gold mine. I suspect that it is only a question of time before a Government decides that it is their gold he is mining. I believe that there several dangers in this situation.

- 1. While the seller states that these items have “no...monetary value” he is SELLING them. Do they have a value or not?*
- 2. I am not sure, but I suspect that at least a few of the items that are being sold are “forgeries” of stamps that are technically still valid for postage- buyers should be aware that Governments are not too keen on people selling, buying or owning such items.*
- 3. If the seller is simply printing these out on a laser printer, perhaps they are worth £3.99 as a curiosity or as a poster for the wall, BUT do the buyers who are paying ten times that amount realise what they are buying?*
- 4. Most importantly, forgetting for a moment the current problems with the situation, years from now (sooner than I want to think), these “forgeries” will start showing up being offered as individual genuine stamps. It would not take a rocket scientist to add perforations to one of these and put it back on eBay. This is a worry because some individual buyers are buying many of the lots.*

As an expertizer, I am very worried about the long-term impact and destruction of collectors’ trust that “forgeries” such as these will have as they work their way into the philatelic marketplace. Please do not inform the seller that you have been contacted as he complains to eBay.

I share, as I am sure that you all do the sentiments of the above writer particularly the point made in item No 4. Yes, it is the brave new world but can we really face the fact that we will leave a legacy of mistrust to future collectors. I feel a great oppression of déjà vu coming on. Surely it was the forger Fournier who said that he was making “art objects for the common man, who could not afford the real thing”. He made copies that trouble us yet, we are now a hundred years after Fournier and he still plagues philately. Do we really want to be remembered as the generation that allowed it to happen all over again?

The problem is, how to stop this infestation, this cancer, of our hobby? It is happening now and not a hundred years ago when we could do nothing about the rogues, who cared nothing for philately and only saw the monetary gain in making reproductions.

Almost certainly, web sites like eBay care nothing or know nothing about philately and will not respond. To judge from the failure of very powerful World-wide Law Enforcement Agencies to stop the display of child pornography on the net, we, as simple stamp collectors stand no chance. We cannot stop these people, because with the removal of one, another

will take his place, the computer is too powerful and the temptation will be always there.

The answer is in our own hands. **DO NOT BUY THIS MATERIAL.** If you really must then at least mark each item with the word “faux” or “facsimile”. If those who have been buying this material desperately want a coloured picture of a stamp to stick in their collection then I will happily provide a pair of scissors and as many coloured catalogues as wanted to cut out the pictures.

As the stamp collectors of the world refuse to buy the material the manufactures will find that they are stuck with a great deal of coloured paper and will give up.

For those “forgeries” that have already entered the market I should mention a few points that will help identify them so that they can either be placed in the rubbish bin or marked.

1. They are in blocks, imperf, upon a crisp, tough, wove white paper with thin white gum. The blocks often do not correspond to the original sheet sizes.
2. They are all clones, each image is identical having been multiplied from a single stamp, unlike for Portugal where the sheets were printed from clichés. The claim that they can be “used as reference material” is rubbish.



3. The reproduction is good and the ink shiny giving the impression of typography.
4. Under magnification the solid colour is seen to be composed of lines of single dots rather like screen printing. My eyes are too old to count the D.P.I. but each line shows the run of the inkjet head in single dots.
5. They are, for now, imperforate, but considering the popularity of “imperf proofs” in Portuguese philately they are dangerous.

6. With regard to the sheet sizes it seems that the forger is no philatelist, he seems not to know that the stamps of Portugal that he is reproducing were printed in panes of 28, but he still makes sheets of 54. From this it would seem that he is simply copying common stamps. Beware, he may get better and as his use of scanning techniques improves, he may be able to manipulate the images to create inverted centres. Do you care for an inverted 1918 U.S. Airmail Jenny? My point being that this is the beginning of the slippery slope and anything can happen.

I now leave the situation to you all and to your consciences. I urge you to help stop this plague, simply do not buy these "forgeries". The problem will not go away immediately but slowly these people will come to realise that we are not total fools and if they wish to paper their walls with 200 reis crown stamps well so be it!

Dave Davies