

Figure 1: Pierre-Yves Pelletier, designer of the series.

### CHARLES J.G. VERGE

Begun in 1988, the annual Masterpieces of Canadian Art series was originally to be a five-stamp series showing Canada's art masterpieces. Although popular with stamp collector's and the art community, these stamps did not always pull at the heart strings of the general population, particularly at the beginning of the series.

Most letter writers and bill payers in Canada like to buy small stamps to put on their envelopes and found the Art stamps, which measure 40mm x 49mm, too big. They are four times the size of the current 46-cent definitive stamp that pays the domestic letter rate. Another reason why they were unpopular initially was that they did not pay any particular rate. They were denominated 50 cents and were found used on packages and registered mail more frequently than on letters.

It was not until the second series was introduced in 1993 that the stamps had a rate to pay. They were denominated for the international letter rate up to 20 grams: 86 cents (1993); 88 cents (1994-95); 90 cents (1996-98) and 95 cents (1999).

Canada Post's definition of art for this series of stamps is not limited to paintings. Some of the stamps show lithographs, sculptures and artifacts that are part of Canada's heritage.

The first dozen stamps, with the date of issue and Scott number in parentheses, are: *The Young Reader* by Osias Leduc (May 20, 1988, Scott 1203); A native ceremonial frontlet (June 29, 1989, Scott 1241); *The West Wind* by Tom Thomson (May 3, 1990, Scott 1271); *Forest, British Columbia*, by Emily Carr (May 7, 1991, Scott 1310); *Red Nasturtiums* by David Milne (June 29, 1992, Scott 1419); a drawing for *The Owl* by Kenojuak Ashevak (May 17, 1993, Scott 1466); *Vera* by Frederick Varley (May 6, 1994, Scott 1516); *Floraion* by Alfred Pellin (April 21, 1995, Scott 1545); the sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* by Bill Reid (April 30, 1996, Scott 1602); *York Boat on Lake Winnipeg* by Walter Joseph Phillips (Feb. 17, 1997, Scott 1635); *The Farmer's Family* by Bruno Bobak (Sept. 8, 1998, Scott 1754) and *Coq Licorne* by Jean Dallaire (July 3, 1999).

Four of these stamps have been issued for specific events: *The Young Reader* for the opening of the National Gallery of Canada in 1988; the ceremonial frontlet for the opening of the Canadian Museum of



Figure 2: A full sheet of the 1998 Masterpiece of Canadian Art, *The Farmer's Family* by Bruno Bobak showing all the marginal inscriptions and details.

Civilisation (home to the Canadian Postal Museum) in 1989; *The Owl* for the 1993 International Year of the World's Indigenous People and *Coq Licorne* for PHILEX-

FRANCE 99, the World Philatelic Exhibition held in Paris July 2-11, 1999.

The designs in the series have been extremely consistent. The design concept of all the stamps has been the responsibility of Pierre-Yves Pelletier (Figure 1) from Montreal who owns his own design company and has been a mainstay within the Canadian stamp design fraternity.

Only in one case was additional help required and that was for the 1996 masterpiece stamp when Pelletier requested that photographer Harry Foster take a photo of *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii* sculpture that sits in the courtyard of Canada's embassy in Washington.

The first five stamps had a thin black frame cutting through the silver frame. This black frame was removed starting in 1993. The 12 stamps have all been issued in panes of 16 (4x4). The top margin of the pane shows the title of the series and the year of issue; the left and right margins name the art, its artist and the location of the original as well as printing information and color dots (also known as traffic lights).

The bottom margin shows a row of 10 Maple Leaves in the color of the foil. All the text is written in Canada's two official languages: English and French (Figure 2). The foil overlay that frames the art work has changed every five stamps. The first five

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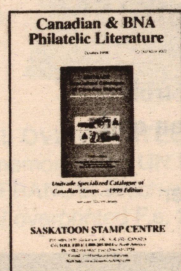
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74c Wapiti	1177i	Rolland	do we have your want list?	-
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Figure 3: The silver series (1988-92).





Figure 4: The gold series (1993-97).



Figure 5: The platinum series (1998-2002).

were bordered in silver (1988-92) (Figure 3), the next five in gold (1993-97) (Figure 4) and the series started in 1998 in platinum (Figure 5).

When put side by side, all the stamps look very similar to one another. However, their production information can be quite different. All the stamps were printed by Ashton Potter Ltd. until the company went bankrupt in 1993. The 1994 stamp was printed by Leigh Mardon Pty Ltd. in Australia and the 1995 stamp by the Canadian Bank Note Co. of Ottawa.

When Ashton Potter reorganized and became Ashton-Potter Canada LW., it re-sumed printing the stamps (1996-99). It is remarkable that with three different printers the stamps retained their similarity. The first five stamps (1988-92) were left untagged as was the custom at the time for medium and high value commemoratives and definitives.

From 1993 until 1997 the stamps received a four-bar tagging in a square configuration on the outer rim of the white portion surrounding the art work. Since 1998 the stamps are printed on fluorescent coated paper.

Perforations have varied as well. Perforating combs measuring 12 1/2x13 were used in 1989, 1991-93 and since 1996. Combs measuring 12 1/2x13 1/2 were used in 1990 while combs measuring 13x13 1/2 saw use in 1988 and 1995. In 1994, the perforation combs were 14x14 1/2 because that is what the Australian printer had on hand.

Print runs varied as well: six million in 1997, 6.7 million in 1992, seven million in 1996 and 1998, 8.7 million from 1993 to 1995 and 10.5 million from 1988 through 1991.

Only one major variety has been reported on the 11 stamps issued prior to this year. It appears on the 1994

*Vera* by Frederick Varley. Two sheets of 16 bearing a major shift of the gold foil were found by Ottawa stamp dealer Ian Kimmerly shortly after they were issued. The gold bar has moved halfway up the stamp and covers Vera's neck and chest while leaving the top and bottom of the stamp missing the gold color (Figure 6).

This year's stamp (Figure 7) is the second in the platinum format that should continue until 2002.



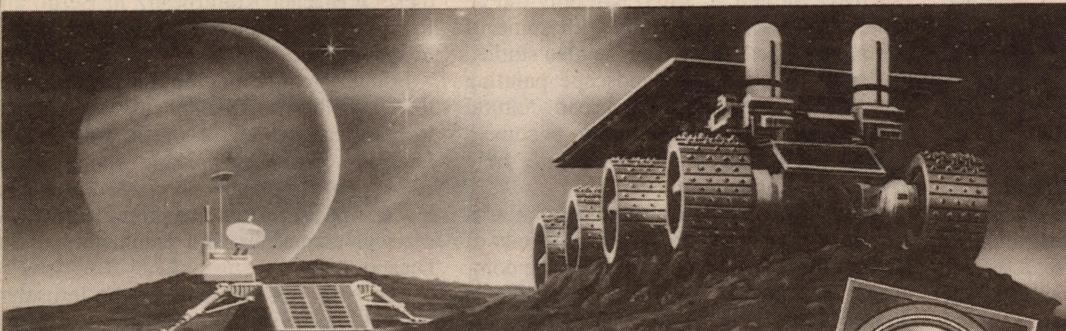
Figure 6: One of the few color errors in the series: the shifted gold color on Frederick Varley's *Vera*.



Figure 7: *Coq Licorne*, the 1999 stamp and first day cover in Canada's ongoing Masterpieces of Canadian Art series.



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