

SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL: OUT OF THE VAULT: THE CERTIFIED PLATE PROOF COLLECTION

Transcript provided by Smithsonian National Postal Museum

[Music]

[Text]: Out of the Vault: The Certified Plate Proof Collection

[Whirring of knob as cabinets are moved]

[Clicking of handle as cabinet door is opened]

Daniel Piazza, Assistant Curator of Philately, Smithsonian National Postal Museum: These are absolutely, it's the only set of this material in the world. And so it's really an irreplaceable collection, a very valuable collection, both in terms of it's uniqueness but as a resource for scholars.

Allen Kane, Director, Smithsonian National Postal Museum: A stamp, little stamp, is a window into the history, heritage, and heroes of the United States. Very important, these images.

[Text]: A certified plate proof is the master copy of a postage stamp. It is the last printed proof from the engraved metal plate before printing the stamps.

[Music]

Kane: One point in time, the Bureau of Engraving were the ones that actually produced all the stamps from the final plate. And the final plate was kinda very important, a lot of people had to sign off that that was the...that was the right image and the right stamp. We ended up with probably about 40,000 of them here. In particular, researchers love, love to look at that. It's hard to see it 'cause it's in the vault and if somebody...but we're now digitizing it so we'll be able to do it online, they're very high resolution.

Emily Smith, Contract Registrar, Smithsonian National Postal Museum: My name is Emily Smith, and I am a contract Registrar here specifically working with the certified plate proof collection. I'm in charge of the digitizing project

[Music]

[Text]: The National Postal Museum is digitizing over 2,000 plate proofs for display on www.arago.si.edu.

[Music]

Smith: Due to the large size of these objects it was hard for us to digitize them here ourselves. So from the 2,000 objects that have been selected I break them into object packages and shipping packages. Due to the extreme rarity of these pieces, they're one of a kind, they're extremely unique, we have to have a security escort whenever they leave the building in order to go to the digitizing facility. So once a week, security comes to the National Postal Museum, they pick me up, they take me to the digitizing facility, we transfer the objects, and we go through a checklist.

Pat Beck, Digital Imaging Specialist, National Geographic Imaging: That's 5522.

[whirring of vacuum]

Beck: We want to get the entire image, all the edges and everything, so there's no, so that, that they get the entire sheet.

[whirring of vacuum]

Smith: So when this project is over, all these images will then go live on Arago, and they'll have their own separate collection on there that researchers and the public can view.

Kane: But equally important is we're creating exhibits online. We actually have visitors from 170 countries now, and, we get an enormous population of visitors coming in online so we're actually working two museums at the same time.

[END]