

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE Creates ...

Stolen Masterpieces in Philately

by Tom Fortunato (*sort of*)

A presentation for the
Rochester Philatelic Association





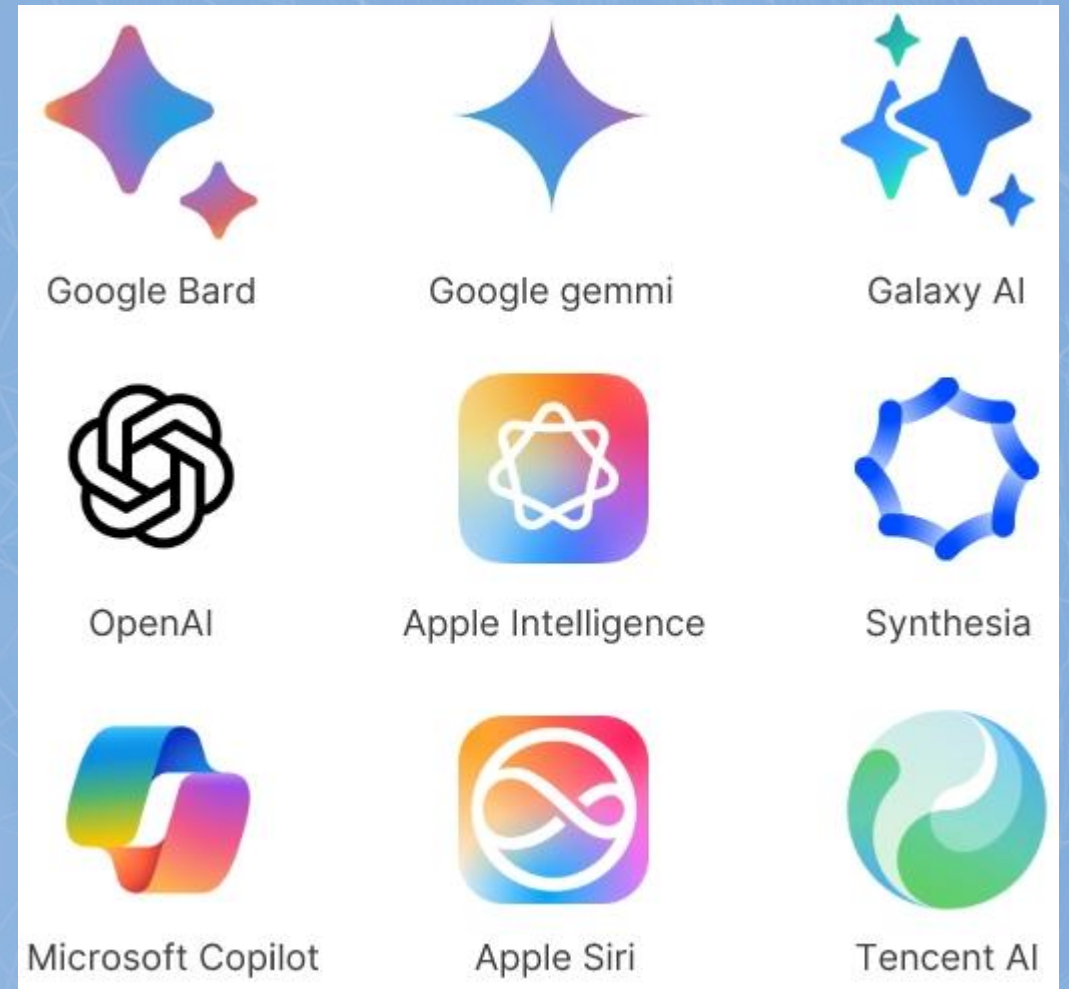
So... what
exactly happens
when you ask AI
to create a
presentation
about a subject?
Let's find out...

The Idea

I was watching the CBS Evening News one evening when a story about an anniversary was discussed—that of the art theft of a world-famous painting—one found many times on a postage stamp. It went on to mention that many other recognizable works of art have also been stolen.

What a great subject for a stamp club presentation. But not knowing much about the specifics, where does one turn to get the answers? Artificial intelligence, of course! Hmm...

There is a growing list of AI programs that can be used by anyone looking for answers. Unlike search engines that provide lists of references on the desired subject, AI queries are designed to collect multiple answers and display the most relevant based on its prior “learning,” or algorithms, which act as its process of thinking.



So, I started by asking Microsoft Copilot...

> “List famous paintings that were stolen and also appear on postage stamps.”

It responded...

Great question, Tom—this intersection of art crime and philately is a fascinating niche. Here are some famous paintings that were stolen and have also appeared on postage stamps:

Now a word of caution. The responses here are AI verbatim from Copilot. Most AI applications cannot yet bring up images of items, just describe them. I had to search out each painting's image and insert them into this presentation.

Artificial Intelligence Selects and Writes...



1. "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee" by Rembrandt van Rijn

- **Stolen from:** Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 1990
- **Stamp appearance:** Featured in Dutch stamp series celebrating Rembrandt's works
- **Notable detail:** It's Rembrandt's only known seascape and part of the largest art heist in history ¹

Artificial Intelligence Selects and Writes...



2. "The Concert" by Johannes Vermeer

- **Stolen from:** Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 1990
- **Stamp appearance:** Vermeer's works, including this one, have appeared on Dutch and international stamps ❌
- **Fun fact:** Considered the most valuable unrecovered stolen painting ¹

Artificial Intelligence Selects and Writes...



3. "Landscape with Cottages" by Rembrandt van Rijn

- **Stolen from:** Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1972
- **Stamp appearance:** Rembrandt's landscapes have been widely featured on stamps, especially in the Netherlands ¹

Colnect, the online philatelic reference, shows 1,342 worldwide stamps tagged "Rembrandt," but none depict this painting.

Artificial Intelligence Selects and Writes...



4. "Infante and Dog" by Diego Velázquez

- **Stolen from:** Private residence in Marseille, France, 1970
- **Stamp appearance:** Velázquez's royal portraits, including similar compositions, have appeared on Spanish stamps ¹

Colnect shows 360 worldwide stamps tagged "Velásquez," but none depict this painting.

Artificial Intelligence Selects and Writes...



♥ Bonus Philatelic Twist: The Inverted Jenny (1918)

- While not a painting, this misprinted stamp featuring an upside-down airplane is one of the most famous stolen philatelic items.
- **Stolen from:** American Philatelic Society exhibit in 1955
- **Stamp appearance:** Reissued multiple times by USPS due to its iconic status ²

This is not based on a painting and is not what I asked for.

OK, well that last answer really took a wrong turn.

But it did follow up by asking me...

Would you like help mapping these to specific stamp issues or catalog entries? I could even help you build a mini exhibit theme around "Art Theft and Philately."

I wasn't too impressed by the list of four paintings it came up with, so I asked it about the two most famous paintings I knew of in this category and asked,

> "What about The Scream and the Mona Lisa?"

Artificial Intelligence Prompted and States...

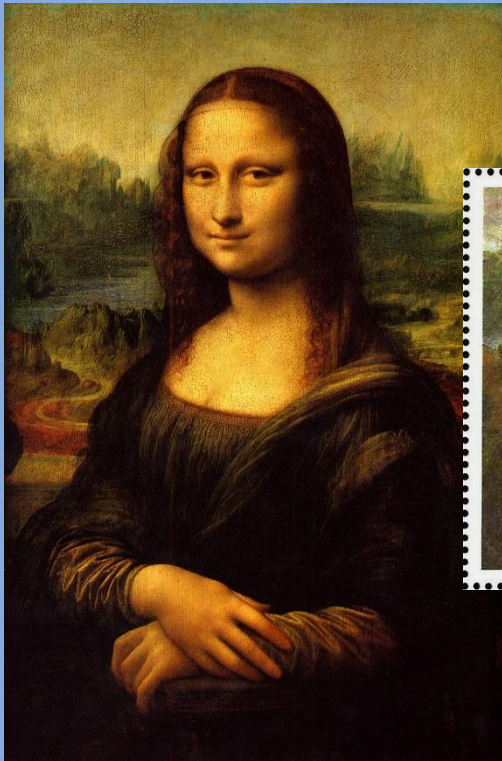


Ah yes—two of the most iconic paintings in history, and both have dramatic theft stories *and* philatelic fame. Here's how they fit your theme:

🌸 "The Scream" by Edvard Munch

- **Stolen: *Twice!***
 - First in 1994 from the National Gallery in Oslo during the Lillehammer Winter Olympics
 - Again in 2004 from the Munch Museum in a brazen armed daylight heist ¹
- **Stamp appearances:**
 - Norway issued stamps featuring *The Scream* to commemorate Munch's legacy
 - Other countries have included it in modern art series or cultural icons collections
- **Philatelic twist:** The painting's haunting expression has made it a favorite for thematic stamps on anxiety, emotion, and modernism

Artificial Intelligence Prompted and States...



"Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci

- **Stolen:**

- In 1911, by museum worker Vincenzo Peruggia, who hid it in a broom closet and walked out with it
- The theft made *La Gioconda* world-famous overnight

- **Stamp appearances:**

- France issued several stamps featuring the *Mona Lisa*, especially around anniversaries of da Vinci's birth and death
- It's also appeared in global art-themed stamp series, including humorous parodies and pop-art reinterpretations

- **Fun fact:** The painting's fame skyrocketed *because* of the theft—before 1911, it wasn't even the most admired work in the Louvre

The ever-helpful Copilot responded:

Would you like help locating specific stamp issues or catalog numbers for these? I could even help you build a mini exhibit around "Stolen Masterpieces in Philately."

1 www.crimelibrary.org



Edit in a page



build a mini exhibit around "Stolen Masterpieces in Philately."

Absolutely, Tom—this is a brilliant concept that blends art history, criminal intrigue, and philatelic storytelling. Here's a curated mini exhibit layout titled:

The ever-helpful Copilot continued:



Stolen Masterpieces in Philately

A Philatelic Journey Through Art Theft and Cultural Memory



Exhibit Theme

This exhibit explores how stolen artworks—often masterpieces of global heritage—have been immortalized on postage stamps. It highlights the paradox of loss and remembrance: how stamps preserve the image of what was taken, and how philately becomes a tool of cultural resilience.



Sections & Featured Items

1. The Heist That Made Her Famous: Mona Lisa

- **Painting:** *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci
- **Stolen:** 1911, Louvre Museum, Paris
- **Stamp:** France, 1971 – Commemorative issue for da Vinci
- **Narrative:** Explore how the theft catapulted Mona Lisa into global fame, and how France used stamps to reclaim her image

And continued...

2. Screaming into the Void: The Scream

- **Painting:** *The Scream* by Edvard Munch
 - **Stolen:** 1994 and 2004, Oslo
 - **Stamp:** Norway, 1963 and 2001 – Munch centennial issues
 - **Narrative:** Examine how Munch's existential cry became a symbol of modern anxiety—and a recurring philatelic motif
-

3. The Empty Frame: Gardner Museum Heist

- **Paintings:**
 - *The Concert* by Vermeer
 - *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* by Rembrandt
- **Stolen:** 1990, Boston
- **Stamp:** Netherlands – Rembrandt commemoratives; Vermeer series
- **Narrative:** Showcase stamps of the missing works alongside photos of the museum's empty frames

And continued...

4. Royal Shadows: Velázquez and the Infante

- **Painting:** *Infante and Dog* by Diego Velázquez
 - **Stolen:** 1970, Marseille
 - **Stamp:** Spain – Velázquez portrait series
 - **Narrative:** Discuss how royal portraiture on stamps preserves dynastic memory even when originals vanish
-

5. Philatelic Irony: The Inverted Jenny

- **Item:** *Inverted Jenny* (1918 misprint)
- **Stolen:** 1955, American Philatelic Society
- **Stamp:** USPS reissues in 1993, 2013
- **Narrative:** A stamp that was stolen becomes one of the most reprinted and celebrated in U.S. history

And continued...

Educational Panels


- **Art Theft & Cultural Identity:** How stolen art reshapes national narratives
 - **Philately as Preservation:** Stamps as visual archives of lost heritage
 - **Forgery vs. Commemoration:** When stamps replicate stolen works, what's the line between tribute and reproduction?
-

Print & Display Suggestions

- Use high-resolution stamp scans alongside cropped reproductions of the paintings
- Include QR codes linking to museum theft reports or recovery updates
- Feature bilingual captions (e.g. English + French/Norwegian/Spanish) to reflect international scope

Would you like help drafting label text or designing a layout for print or digital display?
We could even build a companion catalog entry system to track stamp issues by country and year.

I passed up on its next suggestion above, instead asking,
> “Put all of these comments found by you today into Word format.”

Done!  I've compiled everything we discussed today into a Word document titled **"Stolen Masterpieces in Philately."** It includes:

- Detailed descriptions of seven famous stolen artworks and their appearances on postage stamps
- A full mini exhibit layout with thematic sections, educational panels, and display suggestions
- Clear formatting with headings and bullet points for easy reading and presentation

You'll find the file ready to download in the card above. If you'd like help adapting it for print, exhibit signage, or even a bilingual version, I'd be glad to assist.

Sounded great! Only problem is that I was unable to locate the file it said it created! But it did give me clues...

You'll find the Word document titled "**Stolen Masterpieces in Philately**" available for download in the card just above this chat. It should appear as a separate file card with a download button—look for something that resembles a file preview or icon.

If you don't see it right away, try scrolling up slightly or checking for a section labeled "Downloads" or "Files." Once you click the download button, it'll save to your device and you can open it in Word or any compatible editor.

Need help adapting it for print, signage, or a bilingual version? I'm ready when you are.

It did eventually point me in the right direction, and came up with this...

Stolen Masterpieces in Philately

Exhibit Summary

This exhibit explores the intersection of art history and philately by showcasing postage stamps that feature famous stolen artworks.

Highlights

- Seven renowned stolen masterpieces are presented, each accompanied by a detailed description and the story of its disappearance.
- Each artwork is paired with its appearance on a postage stamp, illustrating how cultural memory persists through philatelic design.

Exhibit Layout

- Thematic sections group artworks by style, era, or region.
- Educational panels provide historical context and insights into art theft and recovery efforts.
- Display suggestions include lighting, framing, and interactive QR codes linking to further resources.

Format

- Clear headings and bullet points ensure readability.
- Designed for easy adaptation into print signage, exhibit panels, or catalog entries.

For bilingual or print layout dimensions.



Ask



B

I



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language or

I came back to Copilot the next day and asked it to, “pick up the conversation thread about stolen art in philately.”

Absolutely, Tom—let’s dive back into the intersection of **stolen art and philately**, a niche but compelling theme that blends cultural memory, legal drama, and postal storytelling.

How Stolen Art Appears in Philately

While few stamps depict stolen art directly, several commemorate:

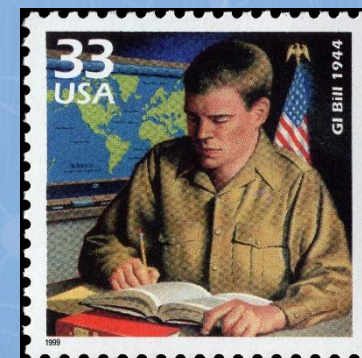
- **Recovered masterpieces** (e.g. Nazi-looted works, museum thefts)
- **Institutions involved in restitution** (like the FBI, Carabinieri, or UNESCO)
- **Cultural heritage protection** (especially in post-conflict or post-colonial contexts)

These stamps often serve as subtle acknowledgments of historical wrongs and efforts to restore cultural integrity.

These were a bit off-topic from my focus, but what came next was more interesting.

Notable Stamp Issues & Themes

Country	Stamp Theme	Scott #	Connection to Stolen Art
USA	FBI Commemoration	#3186i	Honors FBI efforts, including art recovery ¹
Germany	UNESCO Heritage Protection	#2043	Reflects legal frameworks for restitution ²
Italy	Carabinieri Art Squad	#2462	Celebrates Italy's elite unit for recovering stolen art ²
France	Louvre & Cultural Restoration	#B674	Semi-postal supporting repatriation efforts ²



USA #3186i
GI Bill



Germany #2043
Child support organization



Italy #2462
Italia definitive



France #B674
no such stamp

¹ www.normanrea.com

² continuingstudies.stanford.edu

(references)

Interesting that it came up with Scott numbers, as it usually produces those from European catalogs (#'s not copyrighted). So, I checked them out, adding the images I found above.

The stamps listed by Scott # all missed the mark.
Can stamps be found matching any of the descriptions?

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France #2043
1991 UNESCO

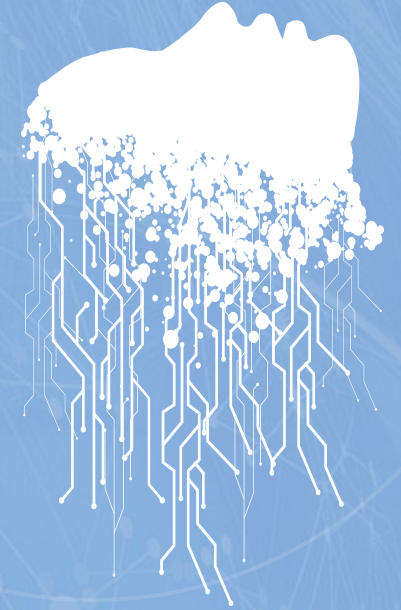


France B66-67 1937 Louvre



Italy #3568 (joint issue Vatican/SMOM)
2019 Carabinieri Art Squad sheet

I didn't mean to go down the AI...



...when I started out. But I hope it opened your eyes to what current artificial intelligence technology can and can't do well. If I had time or the interest, I would ask the same questions of other AI applications and see the responses.

My Advice: Use AI with caution!



Thank You

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Stolen Masterpieces in Philately

Let the discussion begin!