

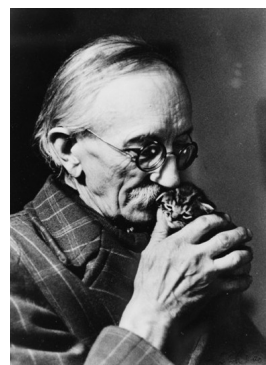
The catalogue raisonné of Bohuslav Reynek's graphic work: paintings, drawings and prints

The Académie delphinale has already published several papers on the life and work of Bohuslav Reynek, a Czech-born artist who became Dauphinois by marriage but was never more than a wayfarer there. Please allow me, dear friends, to present the findings of my research for the catalogue raisonné of his graphic work.

Bohuslav Reynek (1892-1971) was born and died in Petrkov, a small village halfway between Prague and Brno. A Christian-orientated artist, he lived through the turmoil of the Second World War and Communist totalitarianism in Czechoslovakia. His wife, the French poet Suzanne Renaud never left his side and lived in imposed exile far from her native French Alps. It is worth noting that both artists became famous in the other's country. Between the wars Reynek turned to France. He passed that country's culture on to Czechoslovakia through numerous translations of its great writers, and transmitted that of his homeland to France through his art. He won admiration as an artist in Grenoble before gaining recognition much later as a towering creator in his homeland. Conversely, most of Renaud's poetry was first read in her husband's Czech translations and remained unknown in France until her collected works came out in Grenoble in 1999.¹

During the course of his education young Bohuslav, who was born into a family of big landowners, learned French and German and became the first translator into Czech of many literary works from both countries. He never attended art school. His talent bloomed in the loneliness of the family home, far from cities and artistic trends. Reynek's fondness for French poetry took him to Grenoble, where he met Suzanne Renaud and married her in 1926. The couple shared their time between the Dauphiné and Czechoslovakia until the dark clouds of world events caught up with them 10 years later, upsetting the delicate balance of their lives and ushering in a long night of oppression and poverty. But their work glimmered in the darkness and shines on today.

Today Reynek is a recognised artist in his homeland. After briefly coming to light during the 1968 Prague Spring, and then vanishing from the public eye during the two-decade "normalisation" that ended with the 1989 Velvet Revolution, his work has won a place in 20th-century art. It is said that there is nothing in Czech art like his nearly 700 prints. Reynek hardly gave a whit about the late but intense recognition from his contemporaries. More recently, in 2011 and 2012, the 30th and 120th anniversaries of his death and birth, respectively, a string of exhibitions and publications not only in the Czech Republic, but also in places as far flung as China and Japan, celebrated his work as a translator, poet and engraver.



B. Reynek, 1960s.
Photo J. Škoch. Private coll.

¹ RENAUD Suzanne. I *Œuvres – Dilo*, II *Les gonds du silence*. Grenoble: Romarin 1995 and 1999.

I. Bohuslav Reynek's graphic work

1. Location and description

Reynek's known output today includes approximately a thousand works: 11 paintings, 280 drawings and more than 700 prints. Most are in the Czech Republic and France. More will likely come to light elsewhere, through émigrés who left Czechoslovakia in two waves in 1948 and 1968. Despite the political context, Reynek's contemporaries were aware of his work by word of mouth. Around 20 national and regional museums in the Czech Republic now have major Reynek collections. In France, prints and drawings are either scattered about in private collections or two Grenoble institutions: the Museum of Painting, which purchased two drawings during the artist's lifetime, and the Municipal Library, which boasts the biggest public collection in France: 58 prints and 49 drawings donated at different times by Pierre Dalloz and Pierre Vaillant. The Carcassonne media library also has 20 prints.

Reynek switched between several media during periods that could almost be called disjointed. The first was paint, followed by ink, charcoal, pastel and, more rarely, watercolour. These were the main techniques he used until the early 1930s. Reynek tried his hand at linocuts just once, in 1920-1921. In 1933, and until his death in 1971, he put down his pencils to focus on etching and drypoint engraving, two techniques he often combined, and on photographic glass plates, which he used only in the year 1952. He developed a highly personal way engraving with monotype.



L'Église de Saint-Nizier-d'Uriage (1933),
pastel, 240 x 315 mm.
Coll. Galerie výtvarného umění v Havlíčkově
Brodě, inv. n° K 639.

Two main themes dominate Reynek's work: nature and Biblical subjects. He felt close to the countryside and its creatures. His homeland, with its long, harsh winters, inspired many landscapes, blanketed in the snow he awaited while tending his sheep during Advent. There are very few urban scenes. He felt stifled by the city, whereas the landscapes of Petrkov lived inside him, and even featured prominently in the Bible scenes. Some 1938 portraits of *Judas* alluded to the political context,² but religious scenes do not really appear in his output until the late 1940s, when Czechoslovakia was buried under the "ice of the communist winter", as his compatriots put it. The Old and New Testament prints offer a glimpse into the artist's inner life. At first they were monochrome (*Job*, *The Passion*), but they

gradually grew more colourful, with crimson dominating the *Pietas*. Reynek's given name, Bohuslav, which he changed to the French Timothée, means "glorify the Lord", and that is certainly what he does in these prints.

It is relatively easy to locate the landscapes and settings that feature in Reynek's work, for they are where he lived, the place that sparked his creativity: Petrkov. Elsewhere – in Jihlava, where he attended secondary school; Grenoble, where he drew the chapels in the surrounding countryside; and Provence, where he stayed with Giono for a spell in Manosque – he considered himself no more than a wayfarer.

2. The creative process

Nothing is known about how the young Reynek made his paintings, which are already noteworthy. For his French-period drawings, we know that he took his pencils and cardboard with him outside and drew landscapes from nature. He also painted a few rare portraits. The artist's delicate pastels

² A "Judas" bearing a resemblance to Chamberlain, an allusion to the 1938 Munich Agreement, and a bottle of Vichy water, a reference to France's collaborationist regime, can be seen in *Judas I* (*Scenes from the Passion* cycle, 1941-1949), drypoint, 135 x 116 mm.

already illustrate his skills as a colourist. In the early 1930s, at age 40, he broke with the previous period to focus on the works that really distinguish his output: engraving.

Reynek got hold of a handbook, *L'Artiste graveur*,³ and on 3 May 1933 took his first stab at engraving on a press belonging to his friend, a printer named Vokolek. Then he bought his own small mechanical press on which he printed all his engravings.

Printmaking is a long process. First the engraver must “fatigue” the plate by dipping it in a vinegar bath or putting it through the press with emery paper or resin powder. Reynek always had one or two blank plates in his pockets, using them as a sort of notepad to sketch a few lines of a print he had in mind. Almost every summer morning, he would venture out into the nearby woods and observe a little animal or farmers working in the fields. After the war, he sketched his ideas while tending his goats or sheep near the house or watching potatoes used for pig feed cook in the oven.

Then he worked at night during the quiet, peaceful hours after toiling all day on the kolkhoz and putting up with a family that the Communist regime forced him to lodge on the ground floor of his house. Reynek would rise at around one or two in the morning and go about his engraving, sitting alone with his cats in the kitchen next to the fire, his plate on his lap.

When he incised the metal, Reynek did not reverse the motif on the plate in order to achieve the exact image on the print rather than its opposite. That is why all the Petrkov landscapes are reversed left to right and the wound in Christ's loin is sometimes on the wrong side. Reynek coated the plate with black or sepia ink before printing, and then wiped it with light tartalan. He finished his whites by hand, thereby achieving velvety mists or glowing faces, a delicate style that the Grenoble journalist André Séverac praised in a 1950 article entitled “L'essuyeur de nuit” (“The Night Wiper”). When Reynek prepared his plates this way, they produced monochrome prints.

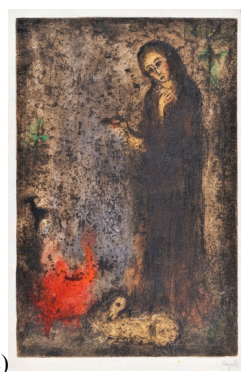
Making colour prints proved a bit more complicated. Reynek blazed a personal path by introducing colours into his prints. At first he achieved this by highlighting them with crayons, sanguine or light oil paints. Then he tried inking the plate itself with two or three colours and printing it once. He soon gave up on these attempts. His experiments led to the “monotype” technique, which requires two passes under the press. First, he used his fingers to dab the engraved plate (a) with various colours and print it to obtain a “monotype” (b). Then he wiped the colours off the plate and inked it again, this time with traditional black ink, and printed the plate on the already coloured paper. The challenge lay in correctly lining up the plate so that the engraved incisions coincided with the colours. The monotype process resulted in unique works (c).



(a) *Abel*, nickel-plated zinc plate,
250 x 160 mm.
Private collection, Czech Republic.



(b) Monotype of a variant of *Abel*.
Private collection, France.



(c) *Abel* (1955), drypoint monotype etching.
Galerie výtvarného umění v Havlíčkově
Brodě, inv. n° G 195.

3 ŠIMON Tomáš František. *Příručka umělce-grafika: o technikách rytiny, lepty a barevného lepty*. Praha: Jan Štenc, 1921.

Reynek always made do with whatever materials were at hand – tissue paper lining an envelope, the back of a wedding announcement, light-sensitive photographic paper, ordinary filter paper, etc. – but Japanese paper was his favourite, and it had an advantage: by turning it over, he could obtain the motif backwards, by transparency. The artist did not hesitate to sign the backs of his prints. Sometimes he used the same engraved plate to make two prints with symmetrical motifs, one on opaque paper, the other on transparent tissue or Japanese paper. His inventive mind led him to play with the transparency of Japanese paper by combining a variant with a monotype printed on it and a sheet with the same motif with black as the main colour, printed on handmade paper as a way of giving the colour more depth.

Reynek used a wide array of different materials: mainly zinc and copper, sometimes formica and brass, and photographic glass plates. Their cost and availability, especially in the 1950s, account for this variety. Many of the plates that have been found were either re-used or used on both sides. That is why, to our knowledge, *Le Chevalier errant (The Wandering Knight)* exists only in France, and in a single print: Reynek re-used the plate later to make *Don Quixote at Toboso*.⁴

I would like to conclude this presentation on how Reynek worked, and on what sets him apart from other engravers, with a few words on how his prints are numbered. Usually, an engraver decides how many prints he will make and numbers them as he goes along, but Reynek did not care about this had stopped doing it by the late 1930s.

II. Cataloguing the work

A catalogue raisonné is based on specific criteria. First, a wide range of information is gathered and the most comprehensive possible list of works compiled. The inventory is then called a catalogue raisonné when it is structured, organised and based on a chosen presentation of the works listed, usually according to theme, technique or chronology.

1. Previous inventories

Reynek never compiled a list of his works, much less of his “studio contents”, a term that may elicit a smile considering the only studio he ever had was his lap. He neither classified, filed, archived nor deposited his works. He gave them away or allowed them to be sold for a pittance...

Alarmed at such carelessness, a young friend of his, the Czech poet and art historian Jiří Šerých, drew up the first inventory of Reynek's work between 1966 and 1985. At first he collaborated with the artist, and then with his sons, Daniel and Michel. Jiří Šerých compiled a file of over 300 handwritten index cards, each matching a print. The cards, which Reynek filled out mainly to make his friend happy, featured small, comic-like sketches to make them easier to locate. After the Velvet Revolution, when university students had more freedom to choose their research topics, Renata Bernardi continued the inventory as part of her Ph.D. dissertation. She classified Reynek's work by technique (paintings, drawings and engravings). This inventory, which contained over twice as many works as the previous one, was published in 1991. It has no illustrations or descriptions of the motifs.

In France the inventory began on a small scale in 1984 in preparation for an exhibition. Key information on the works displayed was collected from the artist's two sons, laying the groundwork for the present catalogue. In 1991, while planning a show of drawings from the Reynek estate at Stendhal House, I decided to broaden the inventory to include works from French

⁴ *Le Chevalier errant*, (1960), drypoint, *Don Quichotte au Toboso*, (1970), drypoint, monotype 140 x 149 mm.

collections as well as from public collections in the Czech Republic, and to revise, augment and amend the previous Czech inventories.

Locating works in public and private collections and scouring the documentary materials allowed me to gather information, which I then transcribed to files. The collection process sometimes proved daunting when the only available source was a summary list of works with titles in Czech that are no more specific than *Krajina* (landscape) or *Zátiší* (still life), without dimensions and usually without illustrations. With no visual sources to go by, or just black and white reproductions, how could anyone tell the difference between several *Crucifixions* or *Pietas* from among the many prints featuring both themes? However, it was possible to draw up an inventory with a description of each listed work, supplemented by information meeting the needs of cataloguing.

2. The file of the present catalogue

For each work there is a standardised ID card with the usual information: title, technique, dimensions, date and visual. The cards are different depending on whether the work is a painting, drawing or print, the three main techniques used by the artist.

The titles, in French and Czech, were usually kept when the artist provided them. Reynek gave his works plain, straightforward names, without poetry or explanations, but sometimes with a touch of whimsy. The titles of works that featured in noteworthy shows were also usually kept, but some – *Still Life* I, II and III or *Pietà* I, II and III – were modified to reflect a particular detail. For example, *Pieta V* became *Pietà aux feuilles*⁵ (*Pieta with Leaves*) because leaves from the previous motif⁶ of this print based on a re-used plate are still visible.

Nearly all the cards have a colour visual. This iconographic material – over 2,000 images – was gathered as the works were photographed, a process that took several years.

Archives were the source of documentary materials, which make it possible to keep track of each work's route through the maze of exhibitions and reproductions in books and catalogues, currently spanning the period from 1927 to 2012⁷.

But cataloguing an engraver's output, especially Reynek's, raises specific challenges that are quite different from those involved in classifying a painter's work. Reynek endlessly reworked his plates, sometimes several years apart, so the successive **states** of the same motif, which range from simple additions to substantial changes, must be taken into consideration.

Sometimes he also did what is called in painting a *pentimento* or modified part of the original motif. An example is *Poisat*⁸, a print Reynek reworked in at least three stages. A large wall with an upside-down Saint Peter, three cherries and the inscription "Longin est un con" ("Longin is an idiot" – those words really were on the wall) can be clearly made out in the first state. In the second state, Saint Peter and the words are barely visible but the cherries can still be made out. The poplars and the hill in the background look most finished in the last state. The name "Poizat" on the sign was corrected to "Poisat". What might account for this regret? As a general rule, Reynek eschewed putting symbols in his work, but Saint Peter and the magpie are here to show that he was "quite unhappy", according to one of his sons, with Pope Pius XII (in French, magpie and Pius are translated by the homonyms *pie* and *Pie*). A practicing Catholic, Reynek may have

⁵ *Pietà aux feuilles* (*Pietà V*), (1965), drypoint, monotype, 120 x 182 mm.

⁶ *Nature morte III*, (1955), drypoint, monotype and colour highlights, 182 x 120 mm.

⁷ 2012 : date of this talk, but research went on and the catalogue keeps getting enlarged and improved.

⁸ *Poisat I*, drypoint, 193 x 157 mm. The first known state is from 1948 based on a variant dated by the artist.

rued his pun later on. He also made some frontispieces for friends, only adding an inscription to the old motif.

Cataloguing Reynek's prints poses another key challenge: the plurality of engravings made with a monotype. Whenever he created a print, his choice and application of colours resulted in a work in its own right, considered unique and called a **variant** in the catalogue.

That is why the card matching each engraving generates a bundle of variant cards. Different prints or variants based on the same plate have their own characteristics: technique (with or without monotype), signature, type of paper, place where the work is kept and handwritten annotation by the artist, if any. The present catalogue lists an average of three variants from the same plate. Some prints made with monotype can have over 10 different variants.

The card matching the work includes a picture of the engraved plate, if found, which is highly informative. That is the case for around 250 cards.

III. The catalogue raisonné

All the cards were put into **chronological** order to create the catalogue raisonné. This lets us follow the development of the artist's work, perceive variations in his style and track changes in his sources of inspiration.

The catalogue is organised into four chapters.

Chapter I. 1892-1926: The shy artist

Chapter II. 1926-1936: Dvojí domov – Two homelands

1. Fleeting years of happiness

2. The engraver comes onstage

Chapter III. 1937-1949: Petrkov

1. The war years: *Snow*, *Pastorale*

2. *Job*

Chapter IV 1950-1971: The major print works

1. The 1950s, the Old and New Testaments, *Don Quixote*

2. "*It is not for the things of this world that I pray.*"

Reynek's works can be organised into these four major periods of his creative life, but dating them sometimes poses a challenge.

1. Dating and numbering

Reynek usually dated his prints until the late 1940s – some 180 works out of 1,000. Then he stopped. Many years later, when sending prints to friends in France or helping Jiří Šerých date his works, the artist would search his memory for an event – a drought or the birth of a kitten – that may have coincided with the work's execution. None of that is "well-reasoned", of course. Only the cross-referencing of various accumulated data, written records and oral testimonials has allowed dating the works as accurately as possible.

For example, *Église de Corenc* (*Church in Corenc*)⁹, a drawing that remains lost – the only existing image is a photograph – was usually dated 1933. But scouring the 1930s press and reviews of Reynek's shows during the period reveals that it was actually exhibited at the 1931

⁹ *L'Église de Corenc I*, (1930), pastel, 316 x 243 mm.

Salon de l'Effort in Grenoble. Moreover, a letter from Reynek to Josef Florian dated 14 November 1930 mentions this work as well as other drawings, which means it must have been made in 1930.

Other grey areas arise in cases where Reynek took a plate to make a variant with a monotype dating from several years earlier, re-used a plate to create a totally new work¹⁰ or recalled a Grenoble scene, such as *Fleuriste rue Lesdiguières*¹¹ (*Florist rue Lesdiguières*), a print based on a 1934 drawing.

The numbering of each item in the catalogue logically follows a chronological order. The works are sequentially numbered first to last with a four-digit figure. The letters P, D or E, which stand for painting, drawing or engraving, come after each number. Roman numeral suffixes – I, II, III, etc. – are added, as the case may be, to the print numbers indicating an engraved plate's successive states and a double-digit number to identify the print or variant. Computer technology has made the process much easier.

2. Stumbling blocks

As Reynek's star rises, so has an inevitable cortege of mishaps, from unauthorised reprints to misattributions, mix-ups, forgeries and apocryphal signatures, all a normal part of the cataloguing process, accompanied the public life of his work.

In theory, engravers scratch their plates to limit the number of proofs and prevent posthumous printings. Reynek could or would not always do this. His son Daniel, who has spent his life participating in printing the engravings, continued making reprints from the original plates, hoping to keep his father's work alive. We have inventoried over 100, but there are actually many more. These coarsely coloured reprints can sometimes be found at auctions. Equally regrettable is the online sale of works with apocryphal signatures, such as the linocut *Sur la place du village* (*In the Village Square*), sold online in 2009. It is not an artist's proof but was removed from a printed book and then signed.

An example of misattribution is the linocut *Martin-pêcheur* (*Kingfisher*), deemed a Reynek after 1991, exhibited as such in Prague in 2011 and sold with that attribution at an auction this year. It is actually by Markéta Florianová.¹² *Papillon* (*Butterfly*) and *Bélier* (*Ram*) were also sold under Reynek's name, but in fact his son Michel (Jiří) created both prints.

3. Computer technology at the service of the catalogue raisonné

Filemakerpro software turned the paper catalogue, by nature unchangeable, into an open-ended database. Many functions have allowed the computerised catalogue of Reynek's works to be organised into a relational database using external tables and strictly predefined lists, ensuring a piece of data's uniqueness wherever it is found in the database.¹³

Of course, computers cannot replace critical thinking and human reasoning, but the catalogue's Internet version may be updated whenever new information comes to light.

¹⁰ For example, the plate of the engraving *Fleurs sur la fenêtre* (*Flowers on the Windowsill*, 1954), 214 x 134 mm, was re-used for *Véronique IV*, (1960).

¹¹ *Fleuriste rue Lesdiguières*, (1960), drypoint and monotype, 176 x 142 mm.

¹² Cf. BEDNÁŘOVÁ Jitka. *Josef Florian a jeho francouzští autoři*, Brno, CDK 2006 (ill. p. 45).

¹³ A slideshow of 83 views accompanied this talk. Browsing the database was demonstrated on screen to the audience, in the different parts of the entry on *Noé fait partir le corbeau* (*Noah Drives Away the Crow*, 1952) as well as in the general catalogue, showing the work's complete sequence according to the four chapters indicated.

Internet users must have File Maker in order to view the database on the Internet, so a nearly comprehensive excerpt with a more visual, user-friendly online consultation function requiring no prior training has been created. Users can browse the catalogue from the general to the particular, focusing on an individual work or variants. Registration is required for specialists or users wishing to deepen their knowledge, obtain information or enrich the catalogue.

In conclusion, while it may seem paradoxical to lock an artist's output into a work based on rigour and discipline, the existence of a catalogue raisonné is helpful. As an always perfectible reference work, it allows validation of the works' authenticity and remains a basic tool for researching, studying and analysing all of the artist's output.

Dare we believe that a catalogue raisonné can ever be finished? We must keep listing and looking at Reynek's works in private collections in the Czech Republic and abroad, as well as studying his correspondence, especially with Czech poets and artists of his time. The engraved plates – the souls and the crucibles of the works, where the world that spawned his magnificent creativity can be glimpsed – still has astonishing surprises in store for us.

My friends, this work in collaboration with the art historian Nathalie Servonnat-Favier on the catalogue raisonné of Bohuslav Reynek's paintings, drawings and prints is still unknown. You are the first to become aware of it with this talk in our company. Thank you for your attention.

Annick Auzimour
Académie delphinale
27th October 2012¹⁴



Petrkov (1962), drypoint, 137 x 217 mm.
Private collection, France

¹⁴ This paper was published in the *Bulletin mensuel de l'Académie delphinale* no. 10, December 2012.