

***OPENING OF THE “BOHUSLAV REYNEK”  
EXHIBITION AT THE MUSÉE DE GRENOBLE***

**November 29, 1997**

This is not the first time that Czech engraver-poet Bohuslav Reynek’s work has been exhibited in Grenoble. It was first shown to the public at a 1927 group exhibition here. Two years later, curator Andry-Farcy acquired one of Reynek’s drawings for the museum, but this is the first time a major French museum is hosting his work. On behalf of his two sons and their many friends from both countries, I very warmly thank the mayor and Serge Lemoine for immediately backing our project of a Reynek exhibition in the Graphic Arts Cabinet.<sup>1</sup> The idea originated with Olivier Félix-Faure, one of the museum’s architects, who knows Reynek’s work and personality well.

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Obviously, Reynek’s work is at home in the Tour de l’Isle, a quiet space far from the city’s noise yet connected to the outside world through the museum’s large contemporary art rooms and the landscape of the old Saint Laurent neighborhood, which can be seen through the windows of the staircase overlooking the Isère.

Reynek loved Saint Laurent because of its little Italians with black eyes, princes of those old streets. It was one of Grenoble’s few places where there were neither barracks nor schools, both of which he loathed because they reminded him of when his father forced him to study engineering. Of course he failed, for the young painter-poet who dreamed of going to forestry school, and did not even enter Fine Arts, had no master.

His deeply personal paintings and engravings were the outcome of a determined, patient, solitary search. Reynek kept himself fiercely distant from the world and fashions but remained receptive to the artistic currents of his time. Several revelations marked his path.

The first was Rouault’s work, which he discovered in his youth while working as a translator with Moravian publisher Josef Florian. This essential outsider of Czech culture (to whom an important exhibition will be devoted next March in Prague) had acquired some Rouault works around 1913, spotting the great painter's talent well before critics did. Isabelle Rouault, who loaned us a plate from *Miserere* for this exhibition, remembers how much this sign of admiration from far away encouraged her father at a time when his art was ignored in France.

The revelation of Rouault’s work, and of many French authors he assiduously translated, was no stranger to Reynek's decision to come to France. Destiny took him to Grenoble, where he married poet Suzanne Renaud. This is where he happily discovered the work of Jongkind and the painters Carrand, Gervat and Ducultit, who became his friend and the godfather of one of his children. These friendships and affinities between young painters were certainly among the highlights of his artistic

career and happy memories of his stay in Dauphiné. Grenoble is also where he had the chance one day to quietly look at Gogol's *Dead Souls* illustrated by Chagall with his friend Andry-Farcy.

From 1926 to 1936, Reynek spent ten winters in Grenoble, long enough to ensconce the artist and poet's work, which has been in private collections for several generations, in our region.

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After Reynek definitively left Dauphiné in 1936 for his birthplace, Petrkov, a long silence fell between his and Renaud's homelands. Despite shows in Grenoble in the early 1950s, Rome in 1967 and again in Grenoble after Reynek's death in 1971, little is known of his work or his influence on his contemporaries. It is especially difficult for connoisseurs in Dauphiné to situate a body of work they are only spottily familiar with and which remains in the shadows, even in the country where it was created.

What really happened in Petrkov in the mid-1960s? As Reynek wrote to a friend in Dauphiné, during summer vacations young visitors from across the country came to listen to records and see the engravings. Suzanne called them "processional caterpillars". Young Czechs at the time heard of this mythical personage who lived like Job in a corner of the country. They were drawn to his personality and vision of everyday life, which, despite all that could lead to despair at the time, showed them a glimpse of a better world.

Here we did not know. It was not until after the fall of the Iron Curtain that we could see the emblematic power of Reynek's work, rehabilitated in Czechoslovakia and featured at a major 1992 retrospective in Prague. After several translation efforts (I would like to thank our friend Xavier Galmiche), we could read the many important studies devoted to Reynek in his country. They have enlightened us, and we gathered some of them together in the small book appearing today.<sup>2</sup>

Reynek made nearly 600 engravings as well as around 200 pastels and charcoals, watercolors and oils.<sup>3</sup> We have been able to freely borrow works of his from the Czech Republic hitherto unknown to the French public.

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This exhibition is not a retrospective.

We have chosen works that seem to us most emblematic of Reynek's originality, bearing witness to his quest for perfection. There is no ornament or trace of pictorial effects in his work. The images are *meditations*, even in the very personal way that he splashed spots of color on his pastels or etchings.

I would like to conclude with something Michel Reynek once said to me about his father: he was "a nomad with a corner of sand at the edge of his tent".

But let us remember that if this great artist belongs to us here in Grenoble a little bit, it is because one day in March 1926 Suzanne Renaud agreed to become his companion. In homage to the poet, the soprano Lenka has come here from Prague with a surprise for us: Renaud's poems set to music, which she will sing tonight for the first time in the museum's auditorium at 7:30 pm.

Please allow me to warmly thank all those who kindly and efficiently helped to organize these events.

Annick Auzimour



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<sup>1</sup> *Bohuslav Reynek*. Grenoble, Musée de peinture (Tour de l'Isle), 30.11.1997-26.01.1998

<sup>2</sup> Collective: *Bohuslav Reynek. L'image dans l'œuvre poétique et graphique* (Romarin, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> In 1997. Since then, new works by Reynek have been found. There are now nearly eight hundred known engravings and over three hundred drawings. The number of paintings has not changed.