



T'ANG HAYWEN ARCHIVES

Catalogue Raisonné – The absolute reference

The typical catalogue raisonné is a monograph (a treatise upon a single subject) giving a comprehensive catalogue of the artworks by an artist.

The term “**catalogue raisonné**” is sometimes subject to interpretation, but it has always meant a complete listing or a complete enumeration.

The subject matter of a catalogue raisonné is defined by the parameters set by the author. Very often the main parameter is: **All the works of one artist**. However, there are many variations and restrictions such as: one type of artwork by one artist; or its scope can be enlarged to include all the works by a group of artists, for example, all the artists belonging to a particular school of painting. Sometimes the scope of a first publication is limited to a particular period or type of works, for example: *Picasso illustrated books* or *Jim Dine prints 1970-1977*.

The essential purpose of a catalogue raisonné is to describe the works so they may be identified and therefore their authenticity certified.

Collectors, buyers, sellers, museum curators, experts and art dealers often make reference to a particular artwork that is in a museum collection, was in a past auction, was the subject of an article etc. They may then compare that piece of art to another that they are considering.

The concern is to ensure that everyone is referring to the same piece of art; and so avoid the following kinds of confusions:

- In some cases, artists do not give titles to their works: which “*Untitled*” are we looking at?
- If the same title is given to more than one artwork: which “*Head of a Woman*” is this?
- One work can have different titles at different times: two people could be looking at different titles without knowing that they are discussing the same piece.

In addition, when the author of a catalogue raisonné offers all the guarantees of a professional and responsible behaviour, the catalogue can help detect fakes, identify stolen artworks, and provide amateurs and professionals with an opinion essentially based on objective facts and research.

A catalogue raisonné is expected to give information on the following aspects of an artwork: image; title; date of execution; medium (ink, watercolor, oil etc.); support (painted on paper, canvas etc.); dimensions; the provenance and possibly the name of former owners, dealers or auctioneers involved; exhibitions; bibliography i.e. a list of literary references, texts and publications; examples of signatures; condition report. For multiples, lithographs, engravings or others, a description of the editions or states.

In addition, a catalogue raisonné may include works that are questionable, disputed and the works allegedly by the artist.



T'ANG HAYWEN ARCHIVES

In the Chinese art world, the catalogue raisonné is often still a very misunderstood or neglected concept. However, we can notice an improvement due to the advantages that the general public can derive from the existence of a catalog raisonné and the recognition by the market players of the importance of the certified authenticity of a work of art.

The term *catalogue raisonné* in the west is widely used with its French spelling, though it is also often translated in other European languages. The role played by France in the development of art history studies and its role in developing a body of laws and principles protecting the artist's copyright may explain the dominant usage of this term in its French form.

One of the first examples of catalogue raisonné is a list of etchings by Rembrandt established in Vienna (Austria) in the 18th century. Another example is *Zervos, catalogue of the work of Picasso* (1881-1973) which is very famous in the art world. The catalogue raisonné of the works of Claude Monet (1840-1926) was compiled by three generations of the Wildenstein family (French art dealers and racehorse owners): they worked on it over the course of 70 years, releasing progressively important publications on the subject, until finally producing a complete catalogue raisonné which was published by the publishing house Taschen in 1996.

Amongst the very few existing catalogue raisonné of modern Chinese artists we can mention:

- The catalogue raisonné of Sanyu (1901-1966), in several volumes by Rita Wong.
- The catalogue raisonné of Zao Wou-Ki (1920-2013) being prepared by Françoise Marquet, the artist's widow assisted by the French art historian, Yann Hendgen.
- The catalogue raisonné of T'ang Haywen (1927-1991) being prepared by Philippe Koutouzis, assisted by Kate Tai.
