

MEDIA RELEASE

Zurich, 14 March 2017



New publications:

Catalogue raisonné
«Niklaus Manuel»

and

Digital catalogue raisonné
«www.niklaus-manuel.ch»

On 30 March 2017, the Swiss Institute for Art Research (SIK-ISEA) will join the Burgerbibliothek of Berne to present the printed version of the catalogue raisonné “Niklaus Manuel” and the digital catalogue at www.niklaus-manuel.ch. Niklaus Manuel of Bern (c. 1484–1530), painter, graphic artist, writer and statesman, was a prominent figure in Switzerland at the dawn of the modern era. His artistic output has long been a topic of interest for international research. The catalogue raisonné now to be released by SIK-ISEA is the outcome of a systematic endeavour to order and document Manuel’s œuvre. The editors are Michael Egli and Hans Christoph von Tavel, with contributions from Petra Barton Sigrist and an essay by Markus Küffner.

The gripping story of Niklaus Manuel’s life intertwines closely with historical and ecclesiastical processes in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, casting light on the history of Bern and the Swiss Confederacy. When we consider his artistic œuvre, with its compelling originality and extraordinary graphic quality, we cannot but notice Manuel’s critical re-evaluation of pictorial conventions established in the Middle Ages. His compositions frequently founded on perspective, a characterisation of human form that seeks guidance from anatomy, a fidelity to natural detail and a fondness for mythological themes are hallmarks of his work which are all quite rightly associated with the Renaissance.

The earliest surviving drawings by Manuel date back to around 1507. His most prestigious works include the Grandson Altar of 1516/1517, the paintings for the choir vaults in Bern Minster in 1517, the damaged murals of 1517–1522 depicting the Dance of Death on the churchyard wall of the Dominican Abbey in Bern, and the Antonius Altar made between 1518 and 1520. Despite these commissions, Niklaus Manuel was unable to pay his bills, and so he fought as a mercenary in Italy, like his colleague Urs Graf of Basel. Both artists reflect critically on this paid soldiering in their works.

After 1522 Manuel seems to have withdrawn from painting as a profession. In 1523 he was elected Governor of Erlach (BE); five years later he sat on the Small Council in Bern. In 1528 he was appointed “Venner” by the Guild of Tanners. In 1529, after the Reformation began, it was his task in this capacity to oversee the confiscation and melting down of liturgical silver from local abbeys and churches. Critical views of institutional religion had already been apparent in Manuel’s writing since his Carnival plays of 1522/23. Manuel died in Bern on 28 April 1530 at the age of about 47. His radical abjuration of art has been described by some researchers as perhaps the most spectacular in European art history.

The printed catalogue raisonné contains two essays by Michael Egli and Hans Christoph von Tavel, who draw on earlier detailed research to situate Manuel's œuvre within the historical context of the early modern era. Alongside a biography of the artist compiled by Petra Barton Sigrist, the essay by Markus Küffner sets out how art technology was used to gain new insights about a Dominican altarpiece. The publication is illustrated by approximately 660 high-definition colour reproductions that meet the discerning requirements of academic investigation.

The catalogue itself includes descriptions and substantiated facts about 293 drawings, sketches, woodcuts, panel and canvas paintings, and murals, 127 of which are copies or of disputed authorship. All the commentaries reflect the latest knowledge on the genesis of the works (with findings from technological examinations), clients and buyers, relationships between different works and the history of their reception, and in so doing they lay the basis for fresh interpretations. Provenance, background literature and an exhibition record are provided for every item. The works are ordered by genre, and within these sections by date, facilitating an in-depth understanding of Manuel's artistic development.

This catalogue raisonné, produced together with the Burgerbibliothek of Berne, presents the fruits of a research project pursued at SIK-ISEA over many years, and it brings together all we now know about Niklaus Manuel. It not only invites us to rediscover Manuel's artistic output in a new light, but awards the artist his rightful place in modern art history.

Printed and digital catalogue raisonné

Michael Egli and Hans Christoph von Tavel with contributions by Petra Barton Sigrist, *Niklaus Manuel: Catalogue raisonné*, published by the Swiss Institute for Art Research and the Burgerbibliothek of Berne, Basel: Schwabe, 2017 (Catalogues raisonnés of Swiss Artists, vol. 29; Schriften der Burgerbibliothek Bern)

2 volumes, bound. Linen with embossed spine, colour dust jackets, woven, headband, ribbon markers, 24 x 29.5 cm, in a colour-finished slipcase, 688 pages, 660 mostly colored illustrations, ISBN 978-3-7965-3630-4

Distributed by Schwabe Verlag, Basel

Subscription price until 31 March 2017

CHF 480.– | € 480.–

Standard price from 1 April 2017

CHF 640.– | € 640.–

The catalogue raisonné will be available through the book trade from 1 April 2017.

Order publication

Digital catalogue raisonné Niklaus Manuel: www.niklaus-manuel.ch (Catalogues raisonnés of Swiss Artists, 29 E), accessible free of charge from 30 March 2017

Book presentation and exhibition

The presentation of the book followed by a panel discussion on "How Manuel speaks to us today?" will take place on 30 March 2017, at 6.30 pm, in the [Bernisches Historisches Museum, Helvetiaplatz 5, CH-3000 Bern](http://www.bernisches-historisches-museum.ch). **Please confirm your attendance by 20 March 2017** by e-mailing sandra.ruff@sik-isea.ch.

The [temporary exhibition "Mercenary, Iconoclast, Dancer of Death: Niklaus Manuel and the Reformation Period"](http://www.bernisches-historisches-museum.ch) can be seen at the Bernisches Historisches Museum until 17 April 2017.

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