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The art of Charles H. Reinike : lagniappes of Louisiana's landscapes and people

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THE ART OF CHARLES H. REINIKI: LAGNIAPPES OF LOUISIANA'S
LANDSCAPES AND PEOPLE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The School of Art

by
Lauren J. Barnett
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ABSTRACT

For Louisiana artist Charles Henry Reinike II, environment acted as a stimulating force and stirred his artistic emotion. Although he began his career in New Orleans during the shock of the Great Depression, Reinike managed to thrive and was a leader in the arts community from the early 1930s until his death in 1983. Most widely regarded for his watercolors rendered in the plein-air tradition, Reinike worked in an impressively varied range of mediums and excelled in many of them. As a poetic artist, Reinike held great passion for Louisiana, and his lyrical paintings read like odes to the beauty of the state. Reinike did not merely paint direct, physical images of the moss-draped trees or bayou vistas that occupied his mind, though. Instead, he tried to grasp their essence, working back from pure abstraction towards half-dreamed images of the places he loved. Reinike was a colorist, and his palette ranged from vibrant to muted tones depending upon his mood.

Reinike gave strength to the stunning qualities of his surroundings, attempting to capture the spirit of Louisiana's landscapes and people. His works are private and personal statements, while being universally understood. Reinike's contribution to the Southern art scene lies in the deeply personal statements about lifestyles in Louisiana that still hang on hundreds of walls of individual homes throughout the country. Beyond his skills at watercolor painting, Charles H. Reinike worked in a variety of other artistic media, throughout which he maintained his distinctive style throughout his career. Over the course of his lifetime, Reinike successfully revealed cultural truths about a momentous time in American history, transcended artistic racial barriers towards African Americans at a time when their depiction in art was minimal, and encapsulated the deep contrasts between the traditional Southern landscape and the modern one that emerged during his career.

INTRODUCTION: A LOUISIANA ARTIST, RE-DISCOVERED

"I wish I was in the land of cotton, old times there are not forgotten."

-Old minstrel song, "Dixie"

Central to the themes of much Southern art is the deep longing for old times, which may have passed, but are far from forgotten. By the early twentieth century, the haunting oak-lined vistas and paddlewheel-churned waters of the mighty Mississippi developed into iconic romantic notions. This was constructed in the wake of a wealth of modern writers, artists, and musicians, who became enthralled with the "Dixie" mindset, spawned in part by the Hollywood film industry and literary classics of the Deep South. From the sentimental Civil War romance of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* to the racial heroism of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the South has become the ideal setting for a remarkable display of one set of American values.

While many of these attempts to illustrate the Southern lifestyle border on the formulaic, the paintings of New Orleans artist Charles H. Reinike's capture the personalities of the region in their truest sense. They are refreshingly delicate and provide perceptive statements on the values of place. However, the watercolors of Reinike define not only a locale, but a time, as well. His paintings are exemplary interpretations of the subtleties of the twentieth century Louisiana scene. While many Louisiana urban dwellers today may never see a mule-and-plow, many people of this region continue to live in harmony with the land. Tradition still persists here, despite the urban growth, and many of the top industries are ones that take advantage of the Louisianan old knowledge of harmony with the terrain. With Reinike as our tour guide, we can look into the future of Louisiana with a clear knowledge of what has passed.

Working at a time of immeasurable social change in one of the nation's most historically significant cities, Reinike rode the wave of tumultuous economic hardship, swift cultural advancement, and changing racial relations in the South. Emerging on the other side of drastically shifting artistic agendas, the artist proved his unyielding position as one of the foremost painters of Louisiana in the history of twentieth century American art. Reinike epitomizes the quintessential Southern artist, working to preserve the character of his region from the 1930s until the 1980s.

Southern art has not been given the attention it deserves, falling low on the ladder of the national canon, but this is not due to lack of talent or absence of cultural centers of artistic growth. The consequences of the Civil War and economic strain, compounded with massive property loss and defeat, are components of the Southern psyche that enter into the visual arts.¹ The South stands as the only region of the nation to have experienced a significant land war on site, and the tremors of this hardship can still be felt in the Southern culture today. While the categorization of Southern art may conjure up ideas of a geographical region, perhaps instead it is best defined by its history. There is an intense, nearly spiritual bond though, that ties a person to their homeland, and artists in the Southern states seem to be especially attuned to this link between people and their land.

It is important to keep in mind that life in the South is tied to more than just a physical space, though, and the subculture and chain of events unique to that region is more substantial in the minds of its inhabitants.² Reinike, along with many other Southern artists of the twentieth century, remained acutely aware of this important fact. In recording the scene, he captured the

¹ Estill Curtis Pennington, *Look Away: Reality and Sentiment in Southern Art* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, Ltd., 1989), 11.

² Albert E. Cowdrey, *This Land, This South: An Environmental History* (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 7.

unseen. The spirit of the place, also known as *genius loci*, is a Roman concept—according to ancient Roman belief, every place had its guardian spirit, which gave it life. Southern artists, as evidenced by Reinike, have found inspiration in local character and have realized that an important determinant of any culture is its spirit of place.³

Unlike paintings produced in the northeastern colonies, the early artistic style of Louisiana developed without significant European influence. While achieving social and cultural independence from England, the South did, however, follow the North's lead, and much of their artistic developments echoed the interests of the colonies. Geography, combined with divergences in social and political philosophies, established distinctive features of Southern culture.⁴ Over time, the South emerged from the shadow of the North and ascertained itself artistically, based upon many tenets of distinctive culture, which will be further discussed.

Before World War I, the South was an overwhelmingly rural society, and well aware of its general isolation from major cultural centers. In the years preceding 1900, American artists, including Southern painters, suffered from anxiety about their perceived lack of individuality, which resulted in an increased desire to elevate their artistic style and subject matter.⁵ However, a rapid boom shortly thereafter in urban populations encouraged introspection, rather than outward exploration. The availability of the automobile, quickly replacing the railroad as a means of transportation, marked the beginning of the bridge between the countryside and urban America and proved to be a “remarkable revolution in social affairs.”⁶

³ Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 18.

⁴ Francis Butler Simkins, *The Everlasting South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 35.

⁵ Richard Cox, *Southern Works on Paper: 1900-1950* (Baton Rouge: Richard Cox, 1981), 3. The narrative-romantic tradition, in the style of Whistler and the Barbizon School, became the guidepost for many during this period, and these artists returned from Europe deeply familiar with this style.

⁶ Corey T. Lesseig, *Automobility: Social Changes in the American South, 1909-1939* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 24.

Newly expanded downtown sections, which also arose directly out of the mass availability of the automobile, further encouraged financial, industrial, and artistic endeavors. Between 1900 and 1920, New Orleans registered an impressive population increase of thirty-four percent.⁷ As skyscrapers and congested streets cropped up in the French Quarter, “progress” threatened many of the historic sites of the Vieux Carré and massive efforts to restore the dilapidated areas were undertaken.⁸ Concurrent with this population growth and restoration of the antique charm of the city, the Vieux Carré became a magnet for artistic production during the first few decades of the twentieth century, attracting intellectuals and artists with its liberal atmosphere amidst a territory of conservatism. Charles Reinike was right in the middle of this new era in Louisianan culture.

Most painters in Louisiana before the turn of the twentieth century relied almost exclusively on portraiture to make a living, but the turn of the twentieth century brought an ever-increasing public demand for more varied artistic depictions, reflecting the drastic shifts in the landscape of the state due to modern technology.⁹ Whereas portraiture and naturalistic art offered visions of reality of the Southern lifestyle, genre painting opened up the world of the imagination, offering opportunity for artists to explore the vibrant essence of the character of a moment in time. Landscape painting, however, sits at an intersection between these polarities, offering visual truth while preserving the spirit of the land.¹⁰ The early twentieth century brought ample opportunity for Southern artists to diverge and explore a multitude of creative avenues.

⁷ David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 130.

⁸ Lynn Barstis Williams, *Imprinting the South: Southern Printmakers and Their Images of the Region: 1920s-1940s* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 5.

⁹ J. Richard Gruber, “Louisiana: The New Century 1900-1945”, ed. Michael Sartisky, *A Unique Slant of Light: The Bicentennial History of Art in Louisiana* (New Orleans: The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, 2012), 112.

¹⁰ Pennington, *Look Away*, 30.

The Southern regionalist trends sweeping through the area between 1915 and 1945 focused on a variety of subjects that were familiar and distinctive to the area. A number of well-established Southern themes fit into the regionalist trend: natural scenes, images of farming, the African American lifestyle, and the charm of Southern cities.¹¹ Many of Reinike's works focused on all of these representations. Emphasis on the principles of the past and unhurried existence, accompanied by elements of nature and agriculture, shaped the constructed vision of the region's cultural image. On the other hand, many of his other works showcased the many ways in which Louisiana was catapulting itself into the modern age at the time.

While many of Louisiana's most significant artists were actually individuals who grew up elsewhere and moved down to the state, or visited for a period of time, Reinike's deep love for the richly diverse land and people of his native Louisiana began as a child. Interpreting not only the lush landscapes of the rural countryside, but also venturing to depict street scenes and social gatherings of the city and surrounding areas, Reinike painted with a creative energy that bordered on passionate fervor. As a major contributor to the New Orleans art scene from the early 1930's until his death in 1983, Reinike captured nearly half a century's worth of Louisiana's history in his visual accounts of the region. Reinike's well-informed approach towards art was progressive, and his experimentation with many different techniques and mediums attests to his open-minded perspective. Reinike believed wholeheartedly in the power of a steady foundation, however, and focused on the importance of mastering the fundamentals of art before aiming towards creative triumph. Instead of seeking out fame for himself, Charles H. Reinike turned much of his energy during his career towards teaching the next generation of artists in the state. As an artist who made little attempt to promote his own artwork, Reinike

¹¹ Mariea Caudill Dennison, *Art of the American South, 1915-1945: Picturing the Past, Portending Regionalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2000), 206.

lives on through the memories and collections of many individuals and institutions in the South, most prominently of his children. Gretchen Reinike Eppling, presently living in St. Francisville, has been an invaluable source of information and documentation about her father's career. His son, Charles H. Reinike III, still maintains the Reinike Gallery today in Atlanta, Georgia, which is a continuation of the school-turned-gallery that Reinike started back in 1930 in New Orleans.¹²

While Reinike's scenes of Louisiana life may appear, on first glance, a bit nostalgic to contemporary viewers, it is important to remember that he was, in fact, capturing the present day scenes of life as they appeared to him. The paintings may appear to be portals into the past, but Reinike was a progressive thinker. Besides the rural scenes he became renowned for, he also captured oil rigs, machinery, and the urban lifestyle with a high level of curiosity and optimism that designated an exceptionally forward-thinking attitude geared towards hope for prosperity and progress. Today, Reinike's watercolors act as historical documents of areas of Louisiana, most of which have altogether different appearances today, since the interminable encroachment of man-made structures upon nature. The following thesis hopes to preserve the legacy of a Louisiana artist who has been largely undervalued in the chronicle of art in the South.

¹² Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, October 30, 2012.

CHAPTER 1: THE CULTURAL CLIMATE OF NEW ORLEANS

The cultural arena of New Orleans has become a part of the national consciousness, arising out of a set of romanticized mythologies about the city that have transformed it from a mere man-made environment into an urban icon. Although legends about the city existed prior to 1920, the words of important literary figures, such as Tennessee Williams and William Faulkner, combined with the efforts of increased tourism, merged to construct an image of New Orleans that exoticized the French Quarter.¹³ At the heart of this urban reconstruction stood a thriving arts community, which continued to flourish through the multitude of changes occurring all around it.

The Development of the City as a Historical and Tourism Site

As a result of the advances in technology, the increasing homogeneity of the national culture furthered efforts to focus on the traditions untainted by modernity.¹⁴ Preservationist efforts revolving around the appreciation for historical sites and culturally distinct landmarks became popular, and the tourism industry blossomed. Tourism between the 1890s and 1910s relied mostly on Mardi Gras revelers and male travelers to the city's prostitution district, Storyville. By the turn of the century, New Orleans had already established itself as a hotbed of jazz music, which influenced artistic creativity and encouraged modernist tendencies.¹⁵ The conservatism of the prohibition age, along with strict military orders for the closing of many

¹³ Anthony J. Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918-1945*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006): 2. Interestingly, during much of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, tourists found little about New Orleans to be different from other American cities. Travel reviews and reports described the city as ordinary in nearly every regard, except for the pervasive popularity of vices, such as gambling and prostitution. New Orleans was unique in one major aspect, however: it was a large city within a rural republic.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁵ Richard Megraw, *Confronting Modernity: Art and Society in Louisiana* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008), 27.

prostitution areas, however, marked the period of the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁶ The nation, however, was still as intrigued by the city's reputation for debauchery. During the 1920s, New Orleans established itself as the land of "dancers, gambling, Mardi Gras, plantations, and thieves," when these themes were expounded upon in twenty-eight different motion pictures set in the city.¹⁷

In 1922, New Orleans's Convention and Tourist Bureau unveiled a new campaign centered around the positioning of the city's new slogan: "New Orleans—America's Most Interesting City."¹⁸ This principle was based upon the "branding" of the city as a cultural anomaly in America, where the past and modern ideals competed. In 1932, the ancient French Market was renovated, giving the area much-needed modern refrigeration and improved access for trucks. This reconstruction, completed in 1938, broke the ties to old-time vendors and resulted in the transformation of the Market into a tourist attraction, occupied by many vendors offering trinkets.¹⁹

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the French Quarter maintained its colorful past, but was in the midst of a tug-of-war between preservationists, who desperately aimed to maintain the integrity of the area, and the opportunistic businessmen, who sought to capitalize on the area's already rampant alcohol and pleasure industry. By World War II, the Quarter became heir to the city's previous reliance on Storyville as an area for debauchery.²⁰

The many newcomers to the city during the war boom created a crowded and demanding

¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷ Don Lee Keith, "Starring New Orleans: A City in Film," *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, Vol. 1, no.1, (2000): 28.

¹⁸ Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy*, 28. Old New Orleans slogans like the "City That Care Forgot" or the "Paris of America" needed to be erased at this time because of the negative perceptions that came with the care-free attitudes and sinful lives suggested by the Parisian atmosphere. The tourism bureau needed to shift attention towards the development of the city and its historic preservation, rather than the debauchery of many of its festivals and traditions, in order to attract potential investors.

¹⁹ Scott S. Ellis, *Madame Vieux Carre: The French Quarter in the Twentieth Century* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 47.

²⁰ Souther, *New Orleans on Parade: Tourism and Transformation of the Crescent City* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 45.

clientele that, in effect, gave birth to the “Bourbon Street culture” of nightlife, taverns, and gambling clubs. The influx of servicemen during World War II also can be credited with the stimulation of interest in New Orleans Jazz. Many of the soldiers and workers stationed in the city, mostly from the north, spent their free time exploring the music scene, later transporting their enthusiasm for the jazz they found there.²¹ The rise of tourism and wartime influx brought new opportunities for the city to capitalize on its distinctive character.

The Bohemian Group of the French Quarter

The first few decades of the twentieth century radically shifted the city of New Orleans on the whole, and provided the impetus for the development of a thriving artistic community. During the 1920s, the French Quarter made a transition between being known as a center of vice to a cultural site, at a time when Americans began seeking reminders of the regional past.²² During this preservationist boom, the Quarter’s exoticism and low cost of living attracted a large group of Bohemian artists and writers, similar to those occupying New York’s Greenwich Village or Paris’s Montmartre.²³ The arrival of these culturally-minded intellectuals, along with a large group of bourgeois residents, contributed greatly to the transformation of the Quarter from decrepit shambles into a cultural preserve.²⁴

The artistic community there was extraordinarily tight-knit, and members socialized in extravagant ways, as well. In the mid-1920s, the Arts and Crafts Club began holding a series of *Bals des Artistes*, a frequent costume and mask affair that quickly became the high point of the social calendar for many New Orleanians.²⁵ The 1938 *New Orleans City Guide* described the

²¹ Ibid, 107.

²² Bernard Lemann, *The Vieux Carre*, 26; Jeannette Raffray, “Origins of the Vieux Carre Commission, 1920-1941,” *Louisiana History* 40, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 286-87.

²³ Joe Bacon, “Preservation: The Morrison Message,” *New Orleans* (Aug. 1982): 54-55.

²⁴ Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 39.

²⁵ John Shelton Reed, *Dixie Bohemia: A French Quarter Circle in the 1920s* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 26.

Quarter as a “place where people go to live their own lives,” as it offered a mecca for individual growth, but also the strength of community encouragement.²⁶ The advent of the New Orleans Spring Fiesta in 1937, established just a year after the Vieux Carré Commission (VCC) was created to regulate the exteriors of the historic buildings, furthered the efforts of the preservationists, as it called both local and national attention to the Quarter.²⁷ The maintenance of the Quarter and its development into an artistic community ushered in great financial success to the city. Based upon the metamorphosis of the Quarter, New Orleans became an influential model for other American cities struggling to solve severe social and economic issues due to urban decay in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁸

Museums, Galleries, and the Greater Arts Community

Throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century, a number of developments occurred within the artistic community of New Orleans, and newly opened museums, galleries, and schools fostered an inexorable wave of creativity in the city. Already by the 1880s, New Orleans had an active and organized art community, which was structured around painting. In 1884, the Woodward brothers established the Sophie Newcomb College for women, which stimulated the community and gave it a jump-start with the establishment of a group of salaried faculty and artistic students. The Delgado Museum of Art, founded in 1910 by philanthropist Isaac Delgado, served symbolically as an important step in the advancement of the arts community, but for the first few decades of its development, it remained isolated from the modernist movements of the local community.²⁹ A new trend in restoration of French Creole

²⁶ Federal Project of the W.P.A. *New Orleans City Guide*. New Orleans, LA: Federal Writers Project of W.P.A. for the City of New Orleans, 1938.

²⁷ Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 40.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 41.

²⁹ Laura Clark Brown, “New Orleans Modernism: The Arts and Crafts Club in the Vieux Carre: 1919-1939,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (Summer 2000), 324.

heritage, when buildings were restored in the 1920s and 1930s, created impetus for buildings to house several major artistic organizations: the Arts and Crafts Club, Le Petit Salon, Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carré, and the Quartier Club.

Out of all the artistic organizations developing at this time, the Arts and Crafts Club was perhaps the most influential. Setting the tone for the French Quarter's artistic scene, the Arts and Crafts Club, founded in 1919, was the only institution that offered serious art instruction for both men and women (women had Newcomb College).³⁰ Its relocation to Royal Street in January 1922 ensured the Club's phenomenal success, as they occupied a vast three-storied warehouse.³¹ The Club offered modern art in both its instructional approach and exhibitions, whereas the Delgado Museum, during the 1920s and 1930s, was under the more conservative leadership of Newcomb College art professor Ellsworth Woodward.³²

By 1925, the Arts and Crafts Club had expanded to nearly five hundred members and offered day and evening classes in drawing, painting, commercial art, metalwork, sculpture, etching, design, and outdoor sketching.³³ The Club, along with the other Bohemian groups downtown, were founded and paid for by the wealthy "uptown" folk. The Club's infamous masquerade balls, as previously mentioned, allowed artists to give creative energies an outlet, releasing fantasies of the inner psyche in extravagant parties that were the direct ancestors of the fantasy krewes of the later part of the twentieth century.³⁴

It is important to recognize New Orleans's newspapers and journalists in the development of the arts community of the city. There were three major papers in the area after 1924, and

³⁰ Reed, *Dixie Bohemia*, 48.

³¹ John W. Scott. "William Spratling and the New Orleans Renaissance," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Summer 2004), 294.

³² Reed, *Dixie Bohemia*, 49.

³³ *Ibid.* 50.

³⁴ Ellis, *Madame Vieux Carre*, 27.

according to *Time* magazine, New Orleans was “one of the hottest competitive newspaper towns in the country.”³⁵ The *Times-Picayune*, *New Orleans Item*, *New Orleans States*, and the *Morning Tribute* all publicized the art circle’s activities, announcing exhibition openings and events. *The Double Dealer*, a journal published between 1921 and 1926, may have been short-lived, but was a noteworthy outlet for modernist intellectuals, and was a major proponent for the literary and artistic scenes in the city.³⁶ The availability of information regarding the social events and exhibitions of the city’s artists was essential to the growth of the arts scene.

The Great Depression and World War II

Despite the bleak economic situation in America, tourism in New Orleans steadily rose, stimulated by Americans’ intensified desire for travel due to the mass production of automobiles.³⁷ Yet, the recent completion of thirty-five million dollars’ worth of renovations to the city’s center left a huge amount of debt in its wake at a troublesome time. When the stock market crashed in 1929, optimism, for the most part, was abandoned. New Orleans, as the country’s fifteenth-largest financial center, was hit especially hard by the depression. However, most of the major financial institutions in the city did manage to stay open, although they did not prosper during this time.³⁸ Foreign trade dropped off at a higher rate than it did nationwide, despite the large size of the port, and the unemployment rates in New Orleans were forty percent higher than the national average throughout much of the 1930s.³⁹

³⁵ Reed, *Dixie Bohemia*, 33.

³⁶ Brown, “New Orleans Modernism,” 328.

³⁷ Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy*, 55. A survey taken in the summer of 1931 revealed that there was a 25 percent increase in the number of motorists visiting New Orleans compared to figures from the previous summer.

³⁸ Roman Heleniak, “Local Reaction to the Great Depression in New Orleans, 1929-1933,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Autumn 1969), 304. The brightest element of New Orleans’s economic picture was, in fact, the sophisticated banking structure, which were a thriving source of stability.

³⁹ Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy*, 74.

When World War I broke out in 1914, the South went from prosperity in an era of rising production and rising prices, to desolate conditions with the disruption of export markets. Post-war, prosperity was restored briefly, but the resulting slump in 1920 inflicted permanent scars upon the cotton crop industry.⁴⁰ Similarly, post-Depression times were characterized in the rural South by a series of crises in Southern agriculture, which unsettled the entire economy and credit system.⁴¹ Governor Huey Long passed a drastic law in 1932 to prohibit the “planting, gathering, and ginning of cotton in 1932,” in attempts to reduce crop production and stabilize the market.⁴² The election of President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression, offered hope of prosperity. Roosevelt’s promises of a more proactive assault on the stagnant economy were exemplified in his New Deal programs offering federal relief. The New Dealers supported an army of artists who set out during the 1930s to “chart America and possess it” who ushered in a new era of modernism across the nation.⁴³

The start of World War II in Europe in 1939 swelled the military presence in the port city and brought the Quarter’s highest population of the twentieth-century, of about eleven thousand people.⁴⁴ This sharp increase in the number of service people and defense workers ushered in a new set of needs and demands for the city. America’s entrance into the War in December 1941 brought a brief period of restraint to the city, but soon the influx of servicemen translated into booming industry for the pleasure sectors. “Anything for the boys” was the mantra that resonated throughout the Quarter, and by the mid-1940s, many of the struggling businesses were given

⁴⁰ George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South: 1913-145* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 33. Cotton prices rose to a high of 41.75 cents in April 1920, and then slid to 13.5 cents in December of that year.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 357.

⁴³ Richard Megraw, *Confronting Modernity: Art and Society in Louisiana*, 14.

⁴⁴ Ellis, *Madame Vieux Carre*, 53.

much relief by the presence of these workers.⁴⁵ The days of World War II became an era of industrial prosperity for New Orleans, as shipyards, training camps, navy bases, and military plants cropped up all over the port city.

Economic and Political Tensions

Huey Long's reign as governor of Louisiana marked a radical period in Louisiana. The Louisiana governor, from 1928 until 1932, and subsequent United States Senator, from 1932 to 1935, built a powerful political organization. On Black Friday 1929, the former Governor John M. Parker warned a group in New Orleans that the city should not permit itself to "be the toy and the plaything of the greatest Mussolini the United States has ever seen."⁴⁶ Overturning the old political machines in the state, Long set out to gain control of state jobs and was vehemently attacked by his angered opponents in 1929, when nineteen charges were filed against him. In an attempt to climb the political ladder even higher, Long launched his "Share-the-Wealth" national campaign in 1933. His term was marked by much political strife, and in 1934, the militia was even called in to intervene when a rival faction sought to overtake the Orleans Parish registration office.⁴⁷

After the corruption of Governor Long's cronies and Long's assassination in September 1935, Robert Maestri's first term as mayor of New Orleans brought some stability back to the city. He even used his own money to make a no-interest loan to the city of New Orleans and made frequent inspections of the city, promptly handling issues that he noticed.⁴⁸ Maestri also bolstered many of the cultural aspects of his city, encouraging artistic and recreational programs.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 54.

⁴⁶ John R. Kemp, *New Orleans: An Illustrated History* (Sun Valley, California: American Historical Press, 1997), 176.

⁴⁷ Federal Project of the W.P.A, *New Orleans City Guide* (New Orleans, LA: Federal Writers Project of W.P.A. for the City of New Orleans, 1938)

⁴⁸ Ellis, *Madame Vieux Carre*, 38.

After the tarnished reputation that Long and his accomplices brought to Louisiana, the city attempted to repair the antagonisms of political disagreement and remained on an upward tract towards political prosperity with Maestri and his successor, De Lesseps Story “Chep” Morrison. Maestri’s powerful connections, along with Louisiana Governor Richard W. Leche’s amicable personality, ensured millions of dollars in Works Progress Administration contracts for the city.⁴⁹

The New Deal and the PWA in New Orleans

Mayor Maestri attained millions of dollars in Works Progress Administration contracts for his city by the early 1940s. His first term was also characterized by major improvements to the cultural environment of New Orleans: he underwrote the ballet and the symphony, restored Catholic convents, and improved the city’s infrastructure.⁵⁰ The WPA programs in Louisiana, significant for a variety of reasons, made art more accessible to the public. The programs also shifted artistic attention from the landscapes so common to the years preceding the war, towards a more populist view of human activity. The Public Works Administration Program (PWAP), which was created in 1933, was an effective instrument in the employment of millions of victims of the harsh economic times of the Depression. The PWAP was not a “work relief” program, like the WPA, which is a common misunderstanding. Instead, the PWAP workers did not have to be unemployed to get a position on the projects, and they received regular wages. Behind this practical stimulus, however, was the strengthening of “physical” and “cultural” infrastructure, inspired by a deep hope for the modernization of the economy and the building, or re-building, of strong communities.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Edward F. Haas, “New Orleans on the Half-Shell: The Maestri Era, 1936-1946,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 13, No. 3, (Summer 1972), 295.

⁵⁰ Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 16.

⁵¹ Robert D. Leighninger, Jr., *Building Louisiana: The Legacy of the Public Works Administration* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), xviii.

The PWAP showcased the most harmonious balance between local initiative and federal oversight of all the New Deal agencies.⁵² Its functions were transferred over to the Federal Works Agency in the summer of 1943, but before its termination it gave a multitude of artists opportunities to work. The PWAP programs had two goals: to beautify public buildings and to provide relief for unemployed artists. In 1933, retired New Orleans artist Ellsworth Woodward assumed the role of overseeing the PWAP programs of Region Six, which positioned New Orleans as a regional PWAP headquarters.⁵³ Woodward set out to identify the needy artists of the region and hired a total of eighteen artists during the first week of the establishment of the program, and of the nine painters employed, Reinike was one of them.⁵⁴ Woodward's choice, emerging out of his longstanding reputation for high artistic standards, denotes Reinike's own artistic standing, since he was one of the selected few out of the many talented artists in the region to work with the program.

Out of the nearly four thousand artists across the nation who participated in the PWA program, sixty-five were from Louisiana.⁵⁵ Charles Reinike was one of these sixty-five artists, and according to a contract signed by Reinike and Ellsworth Woodward on December 16, 1933, Reinike was employed to do "watercolor or oil, of regional activities or industries." He was a participant of the easel project of the program, which encouraged artists around the nation to depict the historical sites and social framework of their cities.⁵⁶ One of Reinike's paintings emerging from this assignment, *Misty Morning* (Figure 1), focused upon a factory arising out of the foggy land of the countryside.

⁵² Ibid., 8.

⁵³ Richard Megraw, *Confronting Modernity*, 50.

⁵⁴ Richard Megraw, *Confronting Modernity*, 52. Among the total of eighteen artists hired during this initiation of the program, Reinike's comrades Clarence Millet and Albert Reiker were also employed.

⁵⁵ Patricia Crosby, "The New Deal Art Projects in Louisiana," Masters thesis (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1981), 55.

⁵⁶ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 13, 2013.



Fig. 1. Charles Reinike, *Misty Morning*, n.d., watercolor on paper, Louisiana State Archives

In Reinike's scene, workers walk towards the looming source of industry. One example of his involvement with the PWAP agency, this watercolor echoes the broader trends of artistic recognition of industrial progression. Although overseen by the artistically conservative Woodward, the PWAP artists of the South chose to focus on the emergent industrialization, and this painting reflects the reinterpretation of the American landscape that emerged from the easel projects of the PWAP in the 1930s.⁵⁷

The early to mid twentieth century was an era of immeasurable social change in America, and in Louisiana all aspects of these transformations manifested themselves. In New Orleans, the very social foundations that supported the city were transformed, and the art followed suit. Always living on the brink, the people of the Crescent City were used to political and social upheavals and crises. Thus, the psychology of the city was distinctive and integral to Reinike's development. Reinike, a mature practitioner, was a part of his time but not necessarily bound by any of its trends. Being a product of the turbulent twentieth century, Reinike was deeply aware of the influences around him, but he interpreted them in his own style.

⁵⁷ Richard Megraw, *Confronting Modernity*, 70.

CHAPTER 2: BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE⁵⁸

Charles Henry Reinike II was born in 1906 in New Orleans and grew up in a German household in the Garden District area of the city. Both sides of his family were of German extraction dating back to the early 1800's in New Orleans. Reinike's father was a grain broker at the New Orleans Cotton Exchange. His relatives had a dairy farm uptown, on land that is now part of Tulane University. Reinike grew up with aspirations to become a doctor, in order to fulfill his mother's dream for him.⁵⁹ However, his innate artistic talent was discovered early on and Reinike's efforts, backed by a strong academic education, quickly became noticed by the established group of New Orleans artists.

Education and Formative Years

At age fifteen, Reinike already showed great artistic promise and was encouraged by his art teacher to attend the Arts and Crafts Club for art instruction. He attended Warren Easton High School and went on to participate in intensive day and night painting courses at the Gradham School of Art in New Orleans. Reinike worked within the city as a commercial artist for several years, before moving to Chicago in 1928 to study at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied fine arts and graphic design for two years.

Following his studies in Chicago, Reinike worked for Pritchard-Thompson Advertising, doing drawings there. He also worked for Grelle-Egerton Engraving Company, taking projects with this company to supplement his income. Reinike also took commissions for a variety of commercial work from businesses all over the city. One such project for the popular "Patio"

⁵⁸ The majority of this biographical information has been pieced together through interviews with Reinike's family, most predominantly with Gretchen Reinike Eppling. In addition, a wealth of information provided in scrapbooks and archives within the homes of Gretchen and her brother, Charles Reinike III, has served as supplemental material to this text.

⁵⁹ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal Interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, January 15, 2013. Later, according to Gretchen, Reinike's mother would even learn how to paint under the guidance of her son, and it became one of her favorite hobbies. She showcased the same natural artistic talent as her son.

fruitcake brand exemplifies Reinike's skill and ability to transfer his talents to the advertising sector (Figure 2).



Fig. 2: Charles H. Reinike, Patio, New Orleans Fruit Cake, n.d., watercolor commercial design, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Along with a serious academic level of art training, the background of commercial work experience allowed artists to make a living, while simultaneously freeing them up to experiment with their most creative work. Going through the rough financial times they did, the choice to create freely what they wished was not an option, but Reinike was able to keep the two types of artistic production (commercial and fine art) separate, maintaining artistic integrity in both forms.

Although the reign of Long in the 1930s brought much upheaval to the state, his artistic patronage was also the source of transformation in the arts community. In addition, the improved highways, bridges, and airports of Long's improved facility initiatives brought new artistic and cultural interaction with the rest of the nation and Latin America. Reinike even took a rather significant job in 1930 doing commercial design for Huey Long. Reinike's drawings were used on "letterheads, auto stickers, and posters" to promote the governor, although Reinike was hesitant to accept the work from the politician.⁶⁰ Evidence of the widespread use of his

⁶⁰ Excerpt of letter written by Charles H. Reinike to Vera Hefter, dated April 27, 1930.

work, Reinike complained that the design (Figure 3) was being used so much, plastered over the whole town that he was “tired of seeing it.”⁶¹

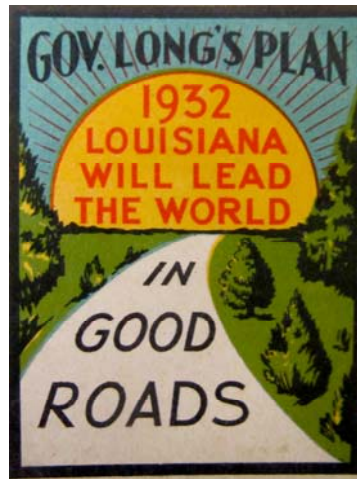


Fig. 3. Charles H. Reinike, Gov. Long's Plan: 1932 Louisiana Will Lead the World in Good Roads, sticker design for Huey P. Long, 1930, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Although Reinike had to compromise his own desires and artistic freedoms for such commercial work, these projects were fundamental in the development of his career. The design for Long's campaign demonstrates Reinike's superb technical capabilities in the artistic realm.

Marriage: An Artistic Team

While studying at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, Reinike met his future wife, Vera A. Hefter (1908-1969), who would later join him in New Orleans. At the Academy, their instructor Roy Ketchum, placed them in assigned seats next to each other. Vera, a native of Hamburg, Germany, was part of an interesting world from the start. Her happy childhood turned bleak when she found herself struggling in the middle of the First World War. Vera and her family spent much of four years dealing with disaster, frustration, and starvation. After the fighting subsided, the Hefter family moved to a cottage outside of Hamburg, where they could

⁶¹ Excerpt of letter written by Charles H. Reinike to Vera Hefter, dated May 1930.

grow their own food and live off the land. The healing countryside, in a return to normalcy, became the major source of inspiration for Vera's appreciation for art.⁶²

In 1923, when Vera's family moved to the United States, she brought with her the optimism and dedication to capturing the delicacies of the beautiful world around her.⁶³ After his schooling in Chicago, Reinike returned to New Orleans in 1930, but Vera remained in Chicago until 1932, when she joined Reinike back in New Orleans to marry him. Reinike wrote to her while they were apart: "We are working for a great cause, nothing should stray us in our effort to succeed. I know you will be a wonderful help to me, and with that help I can make success of my works."⁶⁴ Vera motivated him to produce his best work and guided him towards success. In an excerpt from Charles to his bride-to-be, the artist wrote:

I am going to take your advice, shugs, and practice a lot with my watercolors. I really believe I will do something with these someday. I will make you proud of me, my sweetheart, and prove to the world that you were right to believe in me. When you are my wife, I will appreciate your help and advice, and I know how much harder I will work when you are mine alone.⁶⁵

The Reinikes were viewed as an artistic team in the community, and their encouragement for one another was remarkable. They had three children, who all inherited the artistic sensitivities of their parents: Audrey Hilda Reinike DeBuys (1935-2010), Charles Henry Reinike III (1947-present), and Gretchen Reinike Eppling (1940-present). Charles and Vera supported each other to the fullest, and they even had a joint exhibition at the Delgado Museum in 1952 during the Spring Fiesta.⁶⁶ Vera, along with being an accomplished painter and muralist, was also a fashion

⁶² Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, January 30, 2013.

⁶³ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, January 20th, 2013. The artists' daughter has stressed the steadfast optimism of both parents, especially her mother. The hard times in Germany for the period of World War I established deep values of determination, hard work, and appreciation in Vera.

⁶⁴ Excerpt from a letter written by Charles H. Reinike to Vera Hefter, postmarked September 15, 1930.

⁶⁵ Excerpt from a letter written by Charles H. Reinike to Vera Hefter, written August 7, 1931.

⁶⁶ Delgado Museum of Art brochure, found within the collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling.

designer and art teacher. She had a detailed and delicate style, and many of her paintings were done in a highly finished and polished manner that attested to her good taste. The Reinikes decorated a beautiful home full of fine interior furnishings, as they believed that art started within the home.⁶⁷ Vera became a renowned artist in her own right, and was respected for her murals and decorative designs throughout New Orleans. Vera Reinike passed away suddenly in 1969. As supportive as she was in the career of her husband, he struggled immensely, not just emotionally, with this loss.⁶⁸ In 1975, however, Charles remarried to Marianne Greene Cummins, who supported him through the difficult loss.

Initially, Reinike exhibited his work in New Orleans through Harmanson's Bookstore at 333 Royal Street. Joseph S.W. Harmanson's (Figure 4) patronage of many French Quarter artists was significant, as his financial support launched many struggling young artists and kept their careers alive in the days of the Depression.



Fig. 4: Eugene A. Delcroix, Portrait of Joseph S.W. Harmanson, n.d., photograph, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Harmanson's was an extremely encouraging source of support for Reinike, who sold "quarter-sized" watercolors there, advertising them in the shop windows. These "potboilers" became extraordinarily popular and Reinike's work transcended the local clientele, eventually being

⁶⁷ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, New Orleans, March 18, 2013.

⁶⁸ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, New Orleans, March 18, 2013.

represented in collections within forty-six of the then forty-eight states.⁶⁹ Gretchen Reinike describes how fascinating it was to see how quickly her father had become strong in the medium of watercolor. This skill must have been evident when Reinike was an art student in Chicago because Vera encouraged her husband to go down that path, as detailed in excerpts of love letters between the two, advising him that it would be a wise decision to produce more watercolors, in order ensure financial stability for their impending marriage.

The Founding of the Art School

During the start of his career, the stimulating artistic workplace and its motivated enclave of artists profoundly impacted Reinike and inspired him to further the community's artistic efforts. Reinike along with a group of artists, including Clarence Millet (1897-1959) and Albert Rieker (1890-1959), formed the New Orleans Arts League in 1927, which operated out of their building at 630 Toulouse Street in the French Quarter. The historic building, originally built in 1813, provided a charmingly secluded workspace for the artists. Within this building, Reinike and his comrades opened an art school: the New Orleans School of Commercial Art, which they later renamed the Reinike Academy of Art. The school opened in May of 1930, after several delays brought about by financial stress.

The Depression was an extremely difficult time for Reinike, but his optimism for the arts never waned. Financial stability was far out of reach for Reinike at the start of his career, and he stressed for several years about the source of his next paycheck. Reinike longed to bring Vera down to New Orleans to be with him, and she had aspirations to open a gift shop in New Orleans, but unstable conditions postponed her move for two years. It was not smooth sailing for the artists of New Orleans because even the region's most cosmopolitan city lacked well-funded

⁶⁹ Undocumented news clipping, found within the collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling.

museums, contemporary galleries and collectors, and art critics.⁷⁰ In a letter dated March 25, 1930, Charles Reinike wrote to Vera describing the hard work that he was pouring in to the establishment of the institution, even building the students' desks himself because "the firms wanted too much." He expressed anxiety about the opening of the school, writing: "I am praying hard for success, because it means so much to me."⁷¹ Although the school was able to open, it was difficult to get students and the school was at risk of closing during its first year, as described by Reinike:

I don't know why I am so optimistic about things, conditions surely don't warrant it. The people just haven't any money, and therefore can't be expected to spend any...If things don't change soon I am afraid the school will die a natural death. I am going to do everything in my power to prevent such a thing happening.⁷²

In another letter to Vera in the summer of 1930, Reinike describes the poor conditions: "Everything is as dead as ever. Work is at a standstill, but I have hopes for something new. I live in hopes, and will probably die in despair."⁷³ Vera, as a native of Germany, was especially preoccupied with the outbreak of war in her homeland, as she was worried about the safety of her family members back in Germany. Despite these hardships, however, Charles and Vera both continued to persevere and stayed strongly committed to their artistic goals.

The Reinikes administered the Academy from 1934 until 1944. The school offered a variety of courses, which were a mixture of commercial and fine arts. Vera Reinike taught fashion design, Morris Henry Hobbs taught etching, and Reinike fulfilled the painting component. They even had a medical student from Louisiana State University come in to give a

⁷⁰ Richard Cox, "Genre Art in Louisiana and Mississippi, 1930-1946," *The American Scene and the South: Paintings and Works on Paper, 1930-1946*, ed. Patricia Phagan, (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 1996), 103.

⁷¹ Excerpt from a letter from Charles H. Reinike to Vera Hefter, dated April 12, 1930.

⁷² Excerpt from a letter written by Charles H. Reinike to Vera Hefter, written July 30, 1930.

⁷³ Excerpt from a letter written by Charles H. Reinike to Vera Hefter, written July 7, 1930.

class in anatomical drawing to round out the curriculum. Vera Reinike said, “I do not believe that the course in Commercial art given by this school can be had anywhere else in the city. They can’t get commercial art at Newcomb, they can’t get it at the Arts and Crafts Club and we hope to build up an institution that will do for New Orleans what the Chicago Academy does for that city.”⁷⁴

Reinike elected to ignore the sobriety of the age, choosing to pursue an art that focused on beauty and pleasure instead.⁷⁵ Using art to bolster the spirit, Reinike sustained a commitment to focus on subjects that were both uplifting and honest. Reinike’s art reflects his keen sense for what was truly valuable, and not even the hardships of the Depression could shake Reinike’s faith in the ability of art to encourage others. Reinike proved that the Depression could still offer adequate opportunity for artistic advancement and expansive creativity.

Higgins Industries and Involvement in War Efforts

After the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the quaint landscape of the city suddenly bore a stamp of battle. Military operations blossomed, and shipyards dotted the Crescent City. Reinike’s students at the Academy were lost to military and war jobs, so Reinike finally had to get a job working for a company. He became involved with Higgins Industries Incorporated, which had multiple shipyards and military equipment factories, employing over twenty thousand workers. The company’s rise to status as one of the top manufacturers of naval combat boats translated into a sudden influx of workers into the city. General Dwight D. Eisenhower even described company founder Andrew Jackson Higgins as “the man responsible for the Allies

⁷⁴ Undocumented news clipping, found within the collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling.

⁷⁵ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, February 24, 2013.

winning the war” and boasted that he “praised God” for the corporation’s landing craft, which was used during the Normandy Invasion.⁷⁶

There were seven hundred miles of bus routes established to bring in white and black workers from the rural areas of Louisiana and Mississippi to work in the Higgins plants, thousands of whom were employed to build airplanes at the City Park Avenue plant, just four miles from Bourbon Street.⁷⁷ Higgins employed New Orleans’s first integrated labor force, which had a large number of African American and women workers at the plants.⁷⁸ In fact, his bold approach, which challenged traditional New Orleans business elements, was formed around a labor force that was composed of nearly forty percent black workers, and eighty-percent women.⁷⁹

Higgins Industries, which manufactured the United State Navy’s PT boats and landing craft during World War II, employed Reinike for his artistic ability. His job was to produce perspective drawings for workers who could not read a blue print (Figure 5).

Fig. 5. Charles H. Reinike, Component Part Breakdown of C-48, c. 1940, perspective drawing for Higgins Industries, Incorporated, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

⁷⁶ A. A. Hoehling, *Home Front, United States* (New York, 1966), 52. Eisenhower made this statement during an interview with biographer Stephen Ambrose.

⁷⁷ J. Mark Souther, *New Orleans on Parade*, 19.

⁷⁸ Peter Neushul, “Andrew Jackson Higgins and the Mass Production of World War II Landing Craft,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Spring, 1998), 161.

⁷⁹ John A. Heitmann, “The Man Who Won the War: Andrew Jackson Higgins,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter 1993), 44.

These perspective drawings indicate Reinike's high level of skill in draftsmanship. In addition to this work, in order to justify his gas and tire rations, Reinike even had to take a job of chauffeuring other workers back and forth to work. He also served in the United States Coast Guard reserve, venturing out in picket boats, but this was short-lived due to his older age.⁸⁰

Reinike was also involved in an exhibition dedicated to the accomplishments of Higgins Industries, Incorporated. The Chicago Museum of Science and Industry showcased the company's efforts in an exhibition, which opened in the summer of 1945. Reinike was commissioned to create two murals, each measuring nine feet in height by eleven feet in width, completed on wooden panels, which he painted in New Orleans and shipped to Chicago (Figures 6 & 7).⁸¹



Fig. 6. and Fig. 7. Charles H. Reinike, “Planning” Mural (Left) and “Preparation” Mural (Right) for Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, 1945, photograph of mural, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

The Rise of A Community Leader

A year before the war ended, the Reinikes shut down the school, keeping the space as a gallery, instead. Reinike wanted to focus on his contributions to the community as a teacher, but

⁸⁰ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 13, 2013.

⁸¹ Letter from the Office of Mr. G. W. Rappleyes, Vice President of Higgins Industries, to Charles H. Reinike, dated March 15, 1945. Files saved by Gretchen Reinike.

students were rare due to the financial stress and preoccupation with war efforts. After the war ended, Reinike made plans to set up a large uptown art school, but backed out. Vera asked him if he planned on being a painter full-time or an administrator, and he decided to continue his own artistic endeavors.⁸²

Although he took a step back from teaching in post-war years, in order to produce more artwork himself, Reinike never slowed his involvement with the greater arts community and quickly grew to become a leading figure in the New Orleans arts scene. He rose to become president of the New Orleans Art League and president of The New Orleans Society of Etchers, as well as vice-president and member of the Board of Directors for the Art Association of New Orleans. In the 1950s, he was also appointed Chairman of a special exhibition committee for the Chrysler Collection of North European Renaissance Art at the Delgado Museum.

During the 1950's, Reinike was interviewed and served as a regular co-host on WWL's nighttime radio program, The Trade Mart Program, leading a segment entitled "Art and You."⁸³ At the time, it was reputed to be one of the most informative public interest programs in the South. Broadcast from Loyola University, WWL was noted for having one of the first musical programs to broadcast in the Mississippi Valley.⁸⁴ Reinike's student, John Kent (under the alias Leon Soniat) hosted the program and Reinike was heavily involved with many of the broadcasts (Figure 8).

⁸² Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 10, 2013. According to Gretchen, this was a major decision for her father, and he struggled with it greatly.

⁸³ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 14, 2013. Letters archived in Gretchen's collection at her home detail the success of the program, which was extraordinarily popular with listeners all over the South, especially in the panhandle of Florida.

⁸⁴ Federal Project of the W.P.A. *New Orleans City Guide*. New Orleans, LA: Federal Writers Project of W.P.A. for the City of New Orleans, 1938.



Fig 8. Charles H. Reinike, John Kent, and Arthur Feilel at WWL radio station interview, n.d., photograph, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Reinike discussed the state of the arts and culture in New Orleans, as well as his own artwork and exhibitions he was involved in. According to Gretchen Reinike Eppling, he subsequently conducted a similar program on television, although details have been lost.

The Reinikes restructured their academy into a gallery space, and the new Reinike Gallery opened on November 18th, 1966. Vera Reinike served as director and Mrs. Louiza Harper was the assistant director. The first show was made up of about ten Reinike paintings, which had all been previously displayed in the city. The new gallery was created out of the ground floor studio that Reinike had maintained, but seldom used, for a number of years. The renovation work was done entirely by Charles and Vera, who called on her own decorative talents to marbleize the floors.⁸⁵

Reinike enjoyed the recognition of showing his work in a variety of reputable locations, both in New Orleans and around the nation. After exhibiting his works at the Reinike Gallery, he later showed his paintings at the 331 Gallery on Chartres Street. He also exhibited work at one-man shows at the Bodley Gallery and Columbia University in New York in 1961, with subsequent shows in Chicago and Philadelphia, as well. Reinike was the first living artist to be

⁸⁵ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 13, 2013.

given an exhibit at The Historic New Orleans Collection. The exhibition, open to the public from November 11, 1981 through January 9, 1982, featured the collection of Mrs. P. Roussel Norman. The exhibition included the work of Reinike between the years of 1935 to 1952, and as Reinike did not title or date many of his paintings, the curators of the Collection assigned them descriptive titles. Norman gave the Collection fourteen paintings in 1981, and thirty-four of the paintings within the exhibit toured for two years under the care of the New Orleans Museum of Art. The curators of the exhibition arranged the oeuvre into three sections based on geography: New Orleans and Environs, Southwest Louisiana, and West Feliciana Parish.⁸⁶

Works in Other Mediums

Charles H. Reinike maintained an adamantly multi-disciplinary approach to art, stressing the importance of the well-rounded artist and ability to work in a variety of mediums.⁸⁷ He described his love for watercolors, while stressing the significance of other work:

Color is what I love...the black and white does not thrill me as much. I've worked so long at watercolors, that people have called me a watercolorist, and I said please don't call me a watercolorist, you know, I'm a painter, or somebody might see he's an artist, as well as a painter. At least I can say I can work with many mediums, not just watercolors. Although I would say watercolors fascinate me because of all the mediums I've worked in, it's the most difficult, because the way I work it has to be done wet and it has to be finished wet. It has to be finished before it dries, so it requires a pristine amount of concentration, and you have to have the complete picture in your mind before you start. So you don't change in the middle of the stream, so to speak.⁸⁸

Reinike's extensive background in commercial art prepared him well for a variety of practical artistic mediums, such as printmaking and lithography. In addition, he was well versed in the techniques of pewter work, large-scale mural work, and enamel work.

⁸⁶ The chief curator, Dode Platou, was assisted by three other curators: John A. Mahe II, Rosanne McCaffrey, and John H. Lawrence.

⁸⁷ Gretchen Reinike Epling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 15, 2013.

⁸⁸ Charles H. Reinike, Personal interview with Dode Platou, Tape Recording, 1981.

Although the “Etching Revival” is a much-studied movement that swept the Northeast during the 1880s, the Great Depression seemed to usher in a second expansion of the print market, especially in the South.⁸⁹ Prints were a more viable and economical form of artistic production, envisioned as a feasible alternative to painting for the financially struggling art market due to the ease of multiplicity involved with production. Visiting artists streamed into New Orleans during the 1920s and 1930s, among them Knute Heldner (1875-1952). Heldner, acclaimed for his modern interpretations of the Louisiana landscape, was also well versed in etching and would become a close friend of the Reinikes. Gerry Pierce (1900-1969) and Alice Standish Buell (1892-1964) began to teach etching at the New Orleans School of Art, which may have further influenced Reinike to expand his efforts with printmaking. Another close friend and colleague of Reinike’s, Morris Henry Hobbs (1892-1967), left Chicago in the late 1930s to relocate to the French Quarter’s thriving printmaking community. Soon after his move to the city, Hobbs joined forces with Clarence Millet, David Bowman, and Reinike to organize the Louisiana Society of Etchers in 1939. During the association’s first year alone, twenty printmakers joined the society, which offered an etching press and other equipment to members at the headquarters within the Toulouse Street building also housing the New Orleans Art League. Despite promising beginnings, the organization was short-lived because many of the members joined the war effort.⁹⁰ Reinike’s efforts in printmaking (Figures 9 & 10) resulted in varied styles of compositions and increased breadth of work to sell, but he was governed by his own enthusiasm rather than by the rules of the medium. Reinike eventually stopped etching because he was concerned about his inhalation of nitrous oxide, as well as the way it hurt his

⁸⁹ Lynn Barstis Williams, *Imprinting the South: Southern Printmakers and Their Images of the Region: 1920s-1940s* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

vision.⁹¹ Many of Reinike's etchings reveal a deep sensitivity to the interplay of light and shadow, especially upon architectural features.



Fig. 9. Charles H. Reinike, Wakefield Plantation, n.d., engraving, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling



Fig. 10. Charles H. Reinike, French Quarter Scene, n.d., engraving, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Although most widely recognized as a painter, Reinike was also commissioned to do a number of impressive relief sculptures in pewter throughout his career. His ability to work in a variety of materials, from inlaid felt to fired enamel on copper, was remarkable and earned him respect as a commercial artist. His fired tile installation at Broussard's was well received. Broussard's, a highly esteemed restaurant founded in 1920 by Joseph Broussard, was closed for renovations. Reopening in 1975, the restaurant was given a face-lift when the architecture and interiors were re-designed by Reinike, along with his son Charles Reinike III, Samuel Wilson Jr., and Charles Gresham.

Reinike was commissioned to do many large-scale mural projects throughout his career, as well. He approached the mural projects with as much dedication, enthusiasm, and

⁹¹ Charles H. Reinike, Personal interview with Dode Platou, Tape Recording, 1981.

experimental originality as his watercolor works. Two murals were installed in the once elegant and monumental Jung Hotel on Canal Street, which has since closed.⁹² Though these murals have been lost to the public, they were groundbreaking and exciting commissions for him. One was a six hundred-piece enamel mural measuring approximately twenty-five feet by ten feet, and the other was an inlaid felt mural measuring nine feet in height by thirty-five feet in width.⁹³ As Reinike explained:

I did a fire enamel, it was a full mural, about 20 feet by 10 feet high, had over 600 pieces in it, each one was shaped, and it was an abstract of a swamp. In there, I had irises, frogs, lizards, lilies, and each one of these were three-dimensional. The entire background was gold leaf, and it took 13 hours, working with my wife and my son, to just lay the gold leaf. They changed hands, and I didn't follow up, but it was a good piece, it represented so much work. No one has done a fire enamel mural as large.⁹⁴

In 1975, a Pontchartrain facility, the Bayou Bar, procured Reinike's paintings, too. His murals for the Bar were illusionistic views of panoramic swamp scenes. Pontchartrain Hotel President Albert Aschaffenburg sought an "expansion" to the redecorated room by requesting that Reinike create wide-open expanses of relaxing scenes. Reinike, who had long since steered away from his realistic swamp scenes of his early career by the time of this commission, returned to his roots to depict the beauty of the bayou country for the Bar. He created an eight-foot by fifteen-foot mural on one wall, with additional panels and vignettes on the other walls. He painted the scenes using no preliminary drawings, but constructing the South Louisiana scenes from memory instead.

⁹² The Jung Hotel (open from 1925 until 1979) is now the Radisson Hotel, located at 1500 Canal Street in New Orleans.

⁹³ Charles H. Reinike, Personal interview with Dode Platou, Tape Recording, 1981. Reinike expressed that this may be the first inlaid felt mural ever created. It was an innovative technique developed by Reinike, who said in the interview: "I don't know know if anyone's done it before and I have no reason to believe that anyone will do it again, because it was such a terrible task."

⁹⁴ Charles H. Reinike, Personal interview with Dode Platou, Tape Recording, 1981.

The Pontchartrain Hotel, the historical Uptown building on St. Charles Avenue, commissioned Reinike, once again, to create murals for its esteemed Caribbean Room restaurant. Reinike and Marianne flew to the U.S. Virgin Islands of St. Thomas and St. John in order to research for this project. Reinike recorded the architecture, landscape, and flora of the West Indian islands in numerous sketches (Figure 11).



Fig. 11. Charles H. Reinike, Sketch for Caribbean Room mural, n.d., pastel on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

The meticulous sketch showcases the artist's careful attention to detail, as well as his determination to record an honest and accurate scene. The resulting mural, done in oil on canvas, measured fourteen feet in height by nine feet in width. Reinike's addition to the wall offered tropical atmosphere to the luxurious dining room. Reinike's Caribbean mural had an opalescent quality that nearly recalls French Impressionism, using luminous pastel colors to recreate the impression of island life. The mural was later damaged in a fire that devastated the room, but was cleaned and restored by Charles Reinike III, and is still installed in the room today.

In addition to the Caribbean trip, in previous years, Reinike traveled to several other international locales to gain artistic inspiration throughout his career. He was well traveled within the United States, as well, even going to California with another artist early on in his career. The earliest international trip, a voyage to Mexico in 1937, perhaps was inspired by his

earliest art teacher, who is unidentified, but was a woman of Mexican heritage.⁹⁵ Reinike and his mother drove all the way to Mexico City by automobile. Although no record of the happenings of this journey survives today, Gretchen Reinike Eppling asserts that surely Reinike absorbed everything he could from where he traveled.⁹⁶ He must have been aware and inspired by the momentous events happening in Mexico during the time of his trip there, including the renowned mural work by Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros, which were innovative in the realms of public art. Mexican artists' contributions to mural art, without doubt, would have impressed Reinike and may have influenced his experimental attempts within his own public mural work.⁹⁷

Later, in the early 1960s, Reinike traveled twice to Italy, first to design and supervise the creation of a large mosaic for Mercy Hospital Chapel in New Orleans, then to oversee the execution of his design for a mosaic for the oldest existing church building in New Orleans, Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel located at 411 North Rampart Street. Venice, in particular, had great impact on Reinike's artistic spirit, and he also toured St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Reinike's previous time studying in Chicago must have prepared him well for the historical artworks that he visited in Italy, so the monumentality of the sites visited during the trip must have been deeply felt by the artist.

Reinike was asked to design a sanctuary; a chapel where the devout could pray or the heartsick could plead, for the new wing of the Mercy Hospital. The Sisters of Mercy, who operated the hospital, wished to bring Reinike in to work on this because they recognized his ability to respond with the deepest humility for the sensitive project.⁹⁸ Reinike, as a multi-talented artist, employed his skills in metalworking, along with his muralist expertise. Close

⁹⁵ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 13, 2013.

⁹⁶ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 13, 2013.

⁹⁷ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 16, 2013.

⁹⁸ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 2, 2013.

friend and decorator Charles Gresham worked alongside Reinike to accomplish a complete interior for the chapel.⁹⁹

Reinike and Gresham worked for over a year on this task, and while in Europe, they sought out materials for the project. They found stone and glass in Venice to weave into the rich mosaic representing the cosmos. A wooden crucifix, modeled by Reinike but carved by Italian experts, dominated the altar (Figure 12). Reinike also designed and executed a tabernacle, a slab altar made of rose marble from Portugal, and pewter sculptures and candlesticks to adorn the table (Figure 13).



Fig. 12. Crucifix for Mercy Hospital Chapel, designed by Charles H. Reinike, executed by Italian sculptors, n.d., photograph in Collection of Charles Reinike III



Fig. 13. Charles H. Reinike with his commissioned works for the Mercy Chapel, New Orleans, c. 1965, photograph in collection of Charles Reinike III

were made of walnut wood and pewter. In addition, he created all of the media for the nave, along with wooden statues of Our Lady and St. Joseph, holy-water fonts, and pews fabricated in New Orleans.¹⁰⁰

Upon his return from Italy, Reinike organized an exhibition at the 331 Gallery, at 331 Chartres, which focused on the paintings inspired by his trips to Italy. Reinike titled the show “Italian Interlude” and showcased mixed media works on wooden panels. Of the paintings

⁹⁹ Undocumented news clipping, found within Gretchen Reinike Eppling’s archival material in her home.

¹⁰⁰ Undocumented news clipping detailing Mercy Chapel’s renovations, found within Gretchen Reinike Eppling’s archival material, in her home. The accompanying stained-glass windows were designed by Mr. Lawrence Campbell of Ireland. Daprato Studios of Chicago, using glass imported from France, Belgium, and Germany, executed them.

included, a highlight of the show was of an abstracted depiction of the Venice's San Marco, which Reinike featured in a imaginative aura of golden light which reflected the grandeur of Byzantium.¹⁰¹ These works reflected his emotional response to his tour around Italy, without presenting actual representations of specific scenes. Instead, the abstracted works evoked the textures of timeworn buildings and the textures of the countryside. Reinike stated that he was most moved by the patina-covered details of the cities, which centuries of time have added to their own histories. Ever searching for the beauty of the landscape, he was surprised to find remarkable similarities between the vistas of Italy and those of the plantation country of Louisiana. When asked about the architectural grandeur of Italy, he stated, "Imagine any one of the magnificent old Louisiana homes new finished and standing alone without their girdle of sheltering trees."¹⁰²

Legacy as an Art Teacher

Reinike's enjoyed many major commissions and was critically well received; yet he never achieved broad recognition for his artistic innovations. Instead, he left his mark on the city of New Orleans as a teacher and community leader. Reinike managed to harmoniously balance the demands of his own artistic production with a dedicated lifelong promotion of the arts through teaching. He tirelessly devoted many of his years to the promotion of art in New Orleans and the surrounding area. Reinike cited several artists as sources of inspiration for his work, although he maintained a strictly individualistic approach to his art. For Reinike, Edgar Degas was an artist to be emulated due to his technique endorsing the beautiful softness of the human form. Claude Monet's watercolors, especially the later works, encouraged Reinike to

¹⁰¹ Undocumented newspaper clipping promoting the gallery opening, found in Gretchen Reinike Eppling's archives in her home.

¹⁰² Undocumented newspaper clipping promoting the gallery opening, found in Gretchen Reinike Eppling's archives at her home.

explore color and expression when depicting natural scenes. Reinike studied Monet's paintings extensively first-hand while in Chicago. The Italian masters Leonardo DaVinci and Michelangelo were influential as epitomes of the ideal Renaissance Man. Leonardo asserted the idea that artists should be trained to record truthful visual evidence of the natural world.¹⁰³ Reinike exhibits this tendency in his scenes of the Southern lifestyle. As he pleased the eye with charming scenes, he also recorded the world around him with a nearly documentary approach. In addition, British artist Joseph Mallord William Turner provided some impetus for Reinike's later abstractions, as well as the model of encouragement to act in experimental manners to get ahead of the times.¹⁰⁴

Beyond upholding a reverence for artistic greats of the past, Reinike was also a voracious reader, whose literary interests spanned from Shakespeare to fiction.¹⁰⁵ His well-versed approach to academics was inspired greatly by his avid reading and study of art history. Robert Henri was an exceptional source of inspiration for Reinike, who mirrored Henri's ideals of thorough workmanship and integrity of personal vision. Reinike instilled both of these values in his students, instructing them to value their own originality. Vera gave him a copy of *The Art Spirit*, and he exclaimed that he pored over the same parts over and over, exclaiming that the book is "wonderful, and contains loads of valuable advice."¹⁰⁶ One passage of Henri's *The Art Spirit*, which perhaps best encapsulates Reinike's teaching approach follows:

Know what the old masters did. Know how they composed their pictures, but do not fall into the conventions they established. These conventions were right for them, and they are wonderful.

¹⁰³ James S. Ackerman, *Distance Points: Essays in Theory and Renaissance Art and Architecture* (Boston, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991), 194.

¹⁰⁴ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 10, 2013. Gretchen cited these old masters as influential to her father's work.

¹⁰⁵ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 15, 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Excerpt from letter, written by Charles Reinike to Vera Hefter, May 10, 1930.

They made their language. You make yours. They can help you.
All the past can help you.¹⁰⁷

Although Reinike gained much from the study of art historical greats, he did not let any one movement or artist influence his own style in a substantial way.

Reinike inspired a new generation of artistic engagement within New Orleans. Rolland Harve Golden (1931-present), who was a student at John McCrady's art school during the 1950s, credited Reinike as the main source of inspiration for his watercolors. Rollands stated, "When I started at McCrady's, I had no idea what I wanted to do. Then I saw Reinike's watercolors and I knew I wanted to paint watercolors."¹⁰⁸ Rolland also explained that Reinike was a major Louisiana artist, but he "didn't do anything to promote himself. He disdained it. He felt that art should stand alone."¹⁰⁹ This mindset is indicative to Reinike's commitment to sharing his talent with others, but also explicatory of the reason he has not been widely recognized. Nestor Hippoyle Fruge (1916-present), a well-known French Quarter Jackson Square artist, also expressed that Reinike was the most talented artist out there.¹¹⁰ These reactions of artists still active in New Orleans today reveal the on-going impact that Reinike continues to have on the arts community there. It is hard to measure the significance of his teaching upon the many students he taught over the years. However, it is certain that either his teaching or his paintings impacted many of the foremost artists of New Orleans in the mid to late twentieth century directly, up to the present day.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1923), 16.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Rolland Golden, according to John R. Kemp. John R. Kemp, "A Daughter's Mission: Remembering a Louisiana Artist," *Louisiana Life* (Metairie: MC Media, Spring 2000), 33.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁰ Charles H. Reinike III, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, Reinike Gallery, Atlanta, February 3, 2013.

CHAPTER 3: CITYSCAPES, RURAL SCENES, AND RACIAL SENSITIVITY

Analysis of Cityscapes

Although most widely recognized for watercolors of Louisiana's rural areas, Charles Reinike documented life within the city of New Orleans during the mid-twentieth century, as well. His deep connection to the French Quarter and the locales of the city manifested themselves in many of his paintings. He focused on the personalities of the residents, the architectural splendor of the Quarter, and the churches of the metropolis.

Lookers-On is one urban painting by Reinike that typifies his sensitivity towards New Orleans's residents (Figure 14). Sitting on the front stoop of their home, the family that he chooses to portray seems to be enthralled in a scene going on beyond the scope of the canvas. Their individualistic characteristics are brought to light, but they also form a cohesive family, based upon their body language. The man of the household protectively leans his arm across the doorway, behind his wife.



Fig. 14. Charles H. Reinike, Study for “Lookers-On,” 1940, oil on canvas, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

In another scene of the French Quarter, Reinike draws inspiration from the quietude of the nighttime street (Figure 15) in *Night-time in the Old Neighborhood*. His keen eye for the

subtleties of lighting and atmosphere are evident in this night cityscape, which glows with a greenish glaring radiance emanating from the urban streetlights.



Fig. 15. Charles H. Reinike, *Night-time in the Old Neighborhood*, 1954, watercolor on paper, 2003.1.721, Ogden Museum of Southern Art, Gift of the Roger H. Ogden Collection

Interest in the effects of light and atmosphere upon the architectural buildings of New Orleans was not characteristic of Reinike alone, however. Close friend Clarence Millet also highlighted the effects of night-time upon architectural features of neighborhood scenes. In *Summer Night* (Figure 16), the moonlight casts a soft illumination upon the houses, which presents a distinct demarcation from Reinike's green beams of the artificial effect of the city's streetlights.



Fig. 16. Clarence Millet, *Summer Night*, c. 1935, oil on canvas, Ogden Museum of Southern Art, Gift of the Roger H. Ogden Collection

Reinike also portrayed scenes of the transformation of the urban landscape into one consumed with war preparation during the busy World War II years in New Orleans. He showed

the lives of the hard workers who had roles in the city's wartime efforts, and strenuous action was sometimes pictured (Figures 17-19). We see a reverence for the worker, here, in an earnest respect for the laborers. These photographs of Reinike's wartime paintings were found in Gretchen Reinike Eppling's archival material, but these paintings are unidentified and their whereabouts are unknown. However, they are significant because they denote Reinike's artistic vigor and interest in capturing the frenetic energy of the city during momentous wartime production.



Figs. 17-19. Photographs of unidentified World War II era industry paintings by Charles H. Reinike, n.d., Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Louisiana Artistic Interests and a Return to Nature

The American landscape has been a subject of much study and exploration, and the return to nature following the pervasive effects of technological progress was a common reactionary method in art. The approach of the Hudson River School writers and painters of the nineteenth century, concerned with the constructive contemplation of the wilderness, arose after Jean-Jacques Rousseau's assertion that examining the qualities of freedom and spontaneity found within the wilderness could improve society.¹¹¹ Many Southern artists also embraced nature's "healing" powers, following this precedent. Agrarian scenes of less complex lives are common within the region, and artists recognized the ability of nature to control many aspects of Southern

¹¹¹ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 47-49. Jean-Jacques Rousseau suggested this idea in his 1762 publication, *Emile*.

society, such as its pace and value system.¹¹² Charles Reinike's watercolors of the rural lifestyle maintain the advocacy of the past as a guide to cope with a rapidly changing society, while looking forward to the positive changes that modernism provided to the region.

Although the agenda for the New South had been in progress since the late nineteenth century, the early decades of the twentieth century showed little signs of risk of being overwhelmed by industry. The South, as a whole, offered refuge from the damaging effects of mechanical industry, which by this time was dominating the cities of the Northeast and Midwest.¹¹³ Reinike, although an ardent supporter of the many advancements being made in society, also artistically upheld the belief that the Southern countryside offered one of the last American frontiers to explore. Largely rural in the 1930s and 1940s, Louisiana provided the perfect backdrop for scenes of small farms, "shacks," African-American life, and unspoiled land.

The Development of Audubon Woods

Reinike, although possessing an immense love for the city of New Orleans, made it a priority to re-connect with the unspoiled lands of rural Louisiana, and to assist other artists to do the same.¹¹⁴ He spent each summer during the height of his career with a group of students near Bains, in West Feliciana parish. There, he and Vera established a summertime home for artists, encouraging them to paint the glory of Mother Nature first-hand in the lush Louisiana woods. Located outside of St. Francisville, the little home at Audubon Woods provided students with eight weeks of retreat in the tangled forests in the summer, under the guidance of the Reinikes. The school was not held during the war years.

¹¹² Mariea Caudill Dennison, *Art of the American South, 1915-1945: Picturing the Past, Portending Regionalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2000), 9.

¹¹³ Ibid., 34. The Southern states even spawned a large group of intellectuals who actively opposed industrialization of the region, as evidenced by the 1930 debate held in Richmond, Virginia. Entitled "Shall the South Be Industrialized?", this debate was attended by over 3,500 people.

¹¹⁴ The following section regarding the development of Audubon Woods has been constructed around several interviews with Gretchen Reinike Eppling, who spent many of her childhood summers involved at the school.

Reinike had searched all over the state for years for an ideal spot to set up this artist's retreat, until settling in West Feliciana. Reinike and two companions were on a sketching trip near Pointe Coupee and were about to turn around, when one of his companions suggested that they cross the ferry to see St. Francisville.¹¹⁵ They fell so much in love with this place that soon after, Reinike decided to establish his colony there, near Cedar's Lane. The picturesque ten acre plot of land, a part of the territory that the celebrated artist John James Audubon roamed as he searched for the wildlife he so masterfully rendered in his paintings, served as ideal spot for the artists' colony. Reinike built the camp building himself, which proves his extensive skill in carpentry, yet another talent he possessed.¹¹⁶ Vera Reinike and Clarence Millet both captured the splendor of the wooded retreat in their paintings (Figures 20 and 21) completed while at camp.



Fig. 20. Vera Reinike, Audubon Woods, c. 1940, watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Reinike expressed to his family that he hoped to

Fig. 21. Clarence Millet, Audubon Woods Camp, West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, oil on canvas affixed to board, Estate of Audrey Reinike DeBuys

purchase a home in the countryside because he thought it to be a better place to raise children.¹¹⁷

This reveals his deep values related to family life and the freedom of the countryside. Reinike's

¹¹⁵ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 23, 2013.

¹¹⁶ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 23, 2013.

¹¹⁷ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, February 16, 2013.

attachment to his bucolic home was deeply evident and he held great pride in the success of the summer art colony that he established (Figure 22).



Fig. 22. Photograph of Charles Reinike at Audubon Woods, c. 1940, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Built without modern conveniences, Audubon Woods lacked electricity, and even the pump ran on kerosene.¹¹⁸ For the Reinikes, as well as their students, this break from progress provided all who participated with a chance to escape into idyllic nature.

As Reinike's brochure advertised, the summer camp enticed artists with the charm of the countryside, "where tangled forests and gleaming, white-banked streams inspire young hearts to paint with vivacity and vibrant, pulsing exuberance."¹¹⁹ Composition, landscape, color, and figure paintings were all included in the mediums of watercolor and oil in the course instruction. At the end of the term, the students' work was publically exhibited outdoors at Audubon Woods to a statewide attendance of critics and prospective buyers (Figure 23).

¹¹⁸ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, February 16, 2013. Gretchen expressed the simple lifestyle of the summer art colony, but also marveled at the well-constructed facilities and the camp participants' nice living quarters.

¹¹⁹ Audubon Woods brochure, found within archival material in the home of Gretchen Reinike Eppling.



Fig. 23. Photograph of Exhibition by Audubon Woods Students, c. 1940, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Throughout the course of the camp, Vera scheduled activities in nature for the campers, such as swimming, hiking, and badminton, in order to offer a well-rounded camp experience. The exceptional hospitality of the inhabitants of West Feliciana is cited by the Reinikes as a major component in the success of the camp, as the residents there always welcomed artists and students to their beautiful homes and gardens.¹²⁰

Analysis of Watercolors of Rural Scenes

The 1930s brought a new artistic interest in the lives of workers, such as sharecroppers, shopkeepers, and victims of the days of toil of the economic depression. Reinike's watercolors were more often than not straightforward examinations of rural scenes, but sometimes the workers seem to stand as heroic symbols for virtue. Reinike's rural scenes, although he was painter living in the city, point to his deep personal connections with nature and the land. His subject matter extended beyond the urban landscape of New Orleans, reaching into the surrounding parishes to capture the lifestyle of the rural countryside of Louisiana. In his

¹²⁰ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, February 25, 2013. Gretchen asserts that the success of the camp was dependant upon the collective help of the surrounding community, most predominantly of the plantation families of the area.

interpretive scenes of daily life, Reinike attempted to express his emotions about the ordinary sights that people tend to take for granted.

The nuances of the land in Louisiana, which sometimes are delicately positioned on the verge between being water or earth, are reflected in the freedoms associated with watercolor as a medium. For Reinike, watercolors were ideal for relating the delicate and complex ecosystem of the bayou country, from reflections in streams to swampy sunsets. In the early 1940's, P. Roussel Norman and his wife, Mildred "Sunny" Norman, invited Reinike to organize an art class in their town of Morgan City, Louisiana. It was Mr. Norman's idea to invite him, as the small town offered little opportunity for his creative and talented wife.¹²¹

When Reinike arrived to their home, he found that the couple already owned several of his paintings in their home, which they had acquired at Harmanson's Book Store on Royal Street. Once a week, he traveled there to teach a private class to Sunny Norman and four other students. During these trips, he often went on sketching trips by boat into the bayou country with Roussel Norman. The two became close friends on these excursions, and many of the watercolors within the collection were produced on these trips on the boat. One example of this is revealed in *Mary Lou, Shrimper at Golden Meadow II* (Figure 24). Reinike fuses the architectural form and beautiful craft of the vessel with the movement of the water, accentuated by the oncoming dark clouds, executed with loose brushwork.

¹²¹ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, February 23, 2013.



Fig. 24. Charles H. Reinike, Mary Lou, Shrimper at Golden Meadow II, 1947, watercolor on paper, The Historic New Orleans Collection, gift of Mr. P. Rousell Norman

Reinike, along with many other Louisiana artists of the time, reveled in the awesome beauty of the uncontrolled nature of his state. Celebrating the pristine environment, Reinike featured the atmospheric settings of the swamps and forests throughout the entirety of his career. Reinike celebrates the cheerful beauty of summertime in several sunny paintings of West Feliciana (Figures 25-27).



Figs. 25-27. Charles H. Reinike, Rural Scenes of West Feliciana Parish, n.d., watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Reinike, along with many other Southern artists, presented his region as a land of lush vegetation. Close friend, Clarence Millet, who accompanied Reinike on many of his sketching trips, created paintings that are remarkably similar to Reinike's in style and color (Figure 28).



Fig. 28. Clarence Millet, Levee Road, c. 1950, oil on canvas, 27 x 44 inches, Ogden Museum of Southern Art, Gift of the Roger H. Ogden Collection.

Reinike featured encompassing land of flourishing tight-knit communities and dreamy vistas of sparsely populated terrain. Reinike was strong in conveying the mood, feeling, and forms of his scenes, which are notable for their soft luminosity. He presented his version of a utopian pastoral scene in *Landscape with Nude Bathers and Trees* (Figure 29). The near-abstract dappling effect gives the foliage a light, airy feel that corresponds to the mood of the figures basking in the glory of the summer day.



Fig. 29. Charles H. Reinike, Landscape with Nude Bathers and Trees, n.d., watercolor on paper, 53.8 X 38.4 cm, acc. # 1980. 47.11, The Historic New Orleans Collection

Race Relations in the South

A major component of the study of Southern art lies within the complexities of racial relations. While Louisiana followed larger regional and national patterns of race relations, the state also had its own divergent set of social strata. New Orleans harbored a complex system of multiple racial categories, unlike most cities in the United States that drew a clear line between white and black. The late nineteenth century in New Orleans offered numerous racial categories, including: whites, negroes, mulattoes, *quadroons*, *metis*, *meameloucs*, *sang-meles*, *marabons*, *griffes*, and *sacatras*.¹²² The mixture of white and black relationships, based on varying degrees of hues, created this preposterous number of sub-varieties of racial groups. An era of segregation subjugated the South's black populations, initiated, in part, by the court case of a New Orleans resident, Homer Plessy. The 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson court ruling established this system of "separate but equal," not only for Louisiana, but the whole region of the South, and established the racial mood of the emerging twentieth century.¹²³ Later, in 1954, the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision by the United States Supreme Court would overturn this ruling and bring an end to strict segregation. Until then, however, blacks in Louisiana witnessed fewer social and professional opportunities to their white counter-parts, and subsequently they became united in cohesive racial movements. Louisiana had more branches of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association's "Back to Africa" movement than any other state by 1926.¹²⁴ Despite these racial realities of life in Louisiana, the tensions did not prevent Reinike from respecting the African-American community and showcasing his interest in their lifestyle in his paintings.

¹²² Frederick Law Olmstead, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States* (New York: Knopf, 1962), 228.

¹²³ J. Richard Gruber, "Louisiana: The New Century 1900-1945," 113.

¹²⁴ Charles Vincent, "Of Such Historical Importance: The African American Experience in Louisiana," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 50, No.2 (Spring 2009), 151.

Few Louisiana artists of the early twentieth century dared to extend the role of African Americans within their paintings to any other position than actors of a simple allegorical scene. The South was entrenched in social stratifications, occupied by the “separate but equal” mantra, and the era of racial tension was at its height during the span of Reinike’s career. Reinike severed these racial biases, both in his art and life, showing remarkable sensitivity to the black experience. The relationships that Charles Reinike and his family formed with members of the black community, especially during their time in St. Francisville, were remarkable. They bridged the gap, as they were also close with many of the families who owned the plantations in the area, but they were friends with many lower class members of society, including blacks. While in New Orleans, the children had black nannies, with whom they established close personal relationships. Vera Reinike even taught their maid, Beulah Johnson, how to read when she found out that she was illiterate.¹²⁵

In West Feliciana parish, one black family in particular, the Washingtons, became exceptionally close with the Reinikes. Hilliary and his brother, Isaac Washington, were hired by the Reinikes to clear the land at Audubon Woods, chop trees, build the well house, and provide food.¹²⁶ Reinike built the actual camp building himself, so he learned much from their skills. This was a large undertaking for Reinike, whose carpentry skills were evidenced by this feat of skill. Fanny Tillie was the major cook for the school, and her cooking capabilities were highly esteemed. Even though much of the South struggled with race relations at this time, the Reinike family never saw things in black and white. Although steeped in the “separate but equal” social structure, Reinike often crossed barriers in his life and art that reflect his progressive attitude and

¹²⁵ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 13, 2013.

¹²⁶ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 13, 2013.

high level of respect for others. While never directly addressing the issues of racial prejudice and segregation, Reinike's considerate attitudes towards black people are reflected in his art.

Sensitive Portrayals of Black Culture

While the representation of blacks within the works of late nineteenth-century American artists has been a theme that has received a considerable amount of attention, the portrayal of African-Americans in the mid twentieth century within the context of Louisiana art has been surprisingly overlooked. Much Southern art has had a proclivity towards depicting the African-American community in a way that emphasizes its role as a key carrier of tradition and fading customs. This tendency can be seen in Louisiana artists' works depicting traditional mule-and-plow farming techniques, cabin scenes, and religious congregations. The image of the South as an escape from modernization and a safe haven for nature and agricultural traditions was, for the most part, carried upon the backs of the lower-class African Americans.¹²⁷ Perhaps envy for certain aspects of African American life plays a role in the depiction of the black lifestyle in Southern art. The ability to work and live close to nature and the freedom to live apart from white social conventions seem to be recurring themes in depictions of the African American lifestyle.¹²⁸ If blacks appeared at all in American paintings, they were often shown playing music or entertaining white gatherings or themselves, which showcased a nearly voyeuristic fascination with the culture.¹²⁹

Artistically, Reinike probed beneath the surface of the black experience in Louisiana, depicting the quiet and humble sides of their lives. Reinike had upmost respect for the skills of farmers and laborers, and for the proficiency with hand-tools and cooking. He was also

¹²⁷ Dennison, *Art of the American South*, 65.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 113.

¹²⁹ Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 41.

fascinated by the speech of African Americans in West Feliciana parish, whose dialects were so close to African languages at the time.¹³⁰ Beyond this enthrallment, Reinike admired the physical prowess and intellect of the members of the black community.¹³¹ *Green Apples* (Figure 30) offers a glimpse into a black woman's leisure time, sitting at a table. On the opposite hand, *Coopers* (Figure 31) visualizes black laborers hard at work, in their profession of making barrels.

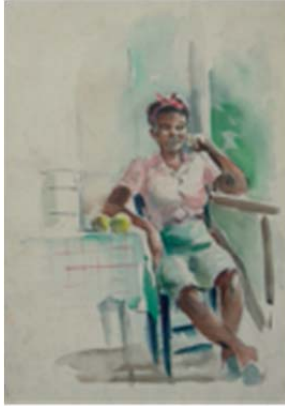


Fig. 30. Charles H. Reinike, *Green Apples*, n.d., watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling



Fig. 31. Charles H. Reinike, *Coopers (Barrel Makers)*, n.d., watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Both compositions take the time to emphasize the attraction of the human form. Whether centered upon the black individual or a group, Reinike always showed the beauty of the human form and treated it with respect. Reinike continued his love for capturing weather conditions, with an etching of a violent thunderstorm (Figure 32) and a watercolor scene of the downpour of a summer rain-shower (Figure 33). He extended these weather phenomena to scenes of African-American life, employing them as another connection between the black lifestyle and nature.

¹³⁰ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 21, 2013.

¹³¹ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 21, 2013.



Fig. 32. Charles H. Reinike, Run, Child, Run, n.d., etching, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling



Fig. 33. The Devil's Beating His Wife, n.d., watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Labor in the fields was also a favorite theme for Reinike, who showed the rhythmic movements of the fieldwork and farming practices (Figures 34-36). The depiction of farming practices and field labor was a category of Southern painting that has long remained prominent in the work of Louisiana artists. However, no contemporary of Reinike's in Louisiana at the time encapsulated the beauty of the land workers as considerately as he did. The study for *Field Hands* (Figure 34) and the resulting watercolor (Figure 35) relates Reinike's ability to visualize a successful composition during study of the subject. Reinike captured the nuances of the movements of the workers in a way that nearly romanticized their actions.



Fig. 34. Charles H. Reinike, Study for Field Hands, n.d., drawing on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling



Fig. 35. Field Hands, n.d., watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling



Fig. 36. Charles H. Reinike, *Field Workers*, n.d., watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

When examining paintings of farming practices, the mule-and-plow technique stands out as a visually evocative theme. Mules stood as symbols for the South, just like live oak trees and magnolias, because they had a venerable history in the region. George Washington bred them and promoted their use in agriculture and farming, and the workers of the twentieth century still employed their help because of their ability to better withstand the heat than their horse counterparts.¹³² By 1925, there were four-and-a-half million mules in the States, with nearly four-fifths of those in the Southern states.¹³³ Their associations with farming practices in the South, in stark contrast to the machines of the North, solidified the mule as an emblem for the idyllic South. Years before Reinike did, artists were capturing the significance of the mule. William Aiken Walker (1838-1921), a frequent visitor to New Orleans and the surrounding area, captured this in *Sharecropper on the Mule* (Figure 37).

¹³² Dennison, *Art of the American South*, 118.

¹³³ Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 197.



Fig. 37. William Aiken Walker, Sharecropper on a Mule, ca. 1890-1920, oil on panel, 11 X 14 inches, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Monroe-Green Collection.

Reinike included mules in his several of his watercolors, usually in conjunction with depictions of African Americans. One distinct example of this approach is displayed in his 1946 watercolor, *Riding the Skid* (Figure 38).



Fig. 38. Charles H. Reinike, Riding the Skid, 1946, watercolor on paper, The Historic New Orleans Collection, Gift of Mildred Gould Norman

Riding the Skid was just one of Reinike's watercolors that featured the role of the mule in rural farming and agricultural practices. Reinike highlighted the physical strength of both mules and horses in a great number of his rural paintings. What is most striking, however, is not an evolution in the depiction of the mule in Louisiana paintings, rather the distinction between the ways African-Americans are presented to the viewer. The nearly offensive caricatures of

Walker's sharecroppers in *Sharecropper on the Mule* reveal a sense of patronizing racism, which disappears within the sensitive individualization of Reinike's African-American laborers in *Riding the Skid*, along with his other works.

One additional rural theme that Reinike wove throughout many of his watercolors was the rendering of rural cabins in the West Feliciana parish region. Although there were no formal architectural trends in the cabins, there were a number of variations between them. While upon first glance, Reinike's many compositions of the cabin structures may seem simple and perhaps a little dull in subject, if one takes the time to study them, a variety of rich and subtle characteristics present themselves. The sensitive attention paid to these architectural features is testimony to Reinike's ability as an insightful painter of rural life. Log cabins in America started with the earliest pioneers, and in the early nineteenth century the population from the eastern seaboard overflowed into the Deep South, but these settlers soon turned the cabins over to slaves and built more substantial homes for themselves.¹³⁴ For some visual artists, the choice to capture the "Negro cabins" may have suggested a need to rule over the lower-class people, but for Reinike, the depictions of the cabins demonstrate an artistic desire to identify with African Americans. Other Louisiana artists attempted to showcase the cabins' romantic beauty, but few did it with such sensitivity towards the cabin dweller. Reinike's friend, Knute Heldner, demonstrates this in his etching *Crayfisher's Shack* (Figure 39), which frames the humble cabin within a shroud of moss-hung cypress trees.

¹³⁴ Mary Wallace Kirk, *Cabins and Characters* (Tuscaloosa: Southern University Press, 1969), 1.



Fig. 39. Knute Heldner, Crayfishers Shack, 1934, etching with drypoint, 7 X 9 inches, Historic New Orleans Collection, Williams Research Center, no. 1999.15.2.

Other artists, such as Heldner, reveal the ability of Reinike's contemporaries to recognize the visual worth of cabins, yet Reinike still stands apart in his approach. Within the cabin lifestyle, Reinike finds an honest existence and a rich life. These small shelters may have seemed to offer some solace, apart from the overwhelming construction of skyscrapers in the city.

Reinike captured both the single-room type and saddlebag type of cabins, with a "lean-to" attached to some of them (Figure 40).



Fig. 40. Charles H. Reinike, Cabin Scene, n.d., watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

These small rooms were attached to one of the larger rooms. Chimneys also varied, ranging from the "stick and dirt" type, which were supported by stilts, to "stack" chimneys made of cut

stone or field rock laid together without mortar.¹³⁵ “Shanghai houses” were another construction type that were popular until the mid-1960s, which were characterized by vertically placed wide planks with narrow ones nailed on top to fill in any gaps.¹³⁶ Cabins have disappeared almost completely from the Southern landscape today, except for those preserved by historic associations. Reinike recognized the beauty of these relics of the older days and attempted to capture their charm (Figure 41).



Fig. 41. Charles H. Reinike, *Cabin Scene*, n.d., watercolor on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Cabin Scene is a prime example of Reinike’s ability to connect the cabin structure to a broader existence. Life in the cabin houses was surely seen as wholesome by those entrenched in the urban geography of New Orleans.

Despite the plantation home ideals of romantic Southern idylls, Reinike did not choose to depict their architectural grandeur very often. This omission speaks loudly, as apparently he fantasized frequently about the artistic beauty of the shacks, but not so often of the imposing

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 2. According to Mississippi historians, the name “Shanghai,” which seems to have nothing to do with the South, arose when sailors brought back techniques from China during those prosperous trade days.

plantation structures. His drawing of *Wakefield Plantation* (Figure 42) demonstrates one of his few studies of the architectural grandeur of the plantation home.



Fig. 42. Charles H. Reinike, *Wakefield Plantation*, n.d., pencil drawing on paper, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Reinike most often featured the homes in various states of decay, emphasizing their aging beauty. The structures, once-thriving, are shown in ruins but still maintaining their dignity. Reinike's overarching focus on the beauty of the rural cabins, coupled with his decisive lack of interest in the romantic Southern idyll of the grandeur of the plantation home, strongly suggests the artist's conscientious attempts to bridge racial divides. This positions him as a forerunner in white artists' attempts to produce truthful artistic documentation of the African American lifestyle.

Along with domestic scenes, the subject of the African American church experience was of great interest to Reinike, who marveled at the strong sense of community between those within the congregation. Reinike was not the only one interested in this artistic theme, and close friend and New Orleans contemporary Knute Heldner (1877-1952) seems to have been similarly stricken by the sight of a rural African-American Sunday morning service (Figure 43).



Fig. 43. Knute Heldner, *Hallelujah*, n.d., oil on canvas, National Archives.

In several paintings, such as *St. Peter's Baptist Church, St. Francisville, Louisiana* (Figure 44), Reinike captured the power of the black religious experience, choosing to depict the social gatherings of a church scene. In this scene, the gathering of a summer's day church service is celebrated in a joyful display of the close community.



Fig. 44. Charles H. Reinike, *St. Peter's Baptist Church, St. Francisville, Louisiana*, c. 1935, oil on canvas, 2003.1.720, Gift of the Roger H. Ogden Collection

The minister, waving from the doorway, Bible in hand, greets his congregation. The individuals are sketched in colorful displays of their Sunday's best attire, but are given their space and anonymity. Reinike encapsulates the dynamic energy of the congregation without intruding on the gathering. The movement of the two mischievous boys on the left resonates with the

umbrella-covered women walking in the road, accompanied by a buggy horse grazing in the right side of the painting. Reinike chose to capture this scene because of his friendship with the Washington family.¹³⁷ They were leaders in the St. Peter Baptist Church community, and Hilliary was even on the Board of Trustees for the church. This painting stands as a testimony to not only the black community's lively and strong congregation, but also to Reinike's close ties with the black families of the community.

¹³⁷ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 22, 2013.

CHAPTER 4: TRANSITION TO ABSTRACTION

Change in Artistic Climate and Shift Towards Abstract Art

By the mid-1940s, the artistic tide turned in America. Representational art, on the whole, was relegated to the shadows of new abstract ideologies. Based on the monumental societal changes of the mid-century, the artistic reaction of abstraction became an outlet for deeper expression. The Abstract Expressionists, based in New York, were the school of painters responsible for such radical changes. Reinike responded to this shift by experimenting more with abstraction and moving towards a more spiritually introspective type of art.

The Delgado Museum of Art (now the New Orleans Museum of Art) featured sixteen of Reinike's watercolors in a one-man show that attracted large crowds, opening in January 1947. In this exhibition, according to reviews, it is apparent that there is a shift occurring in the approach of the artist, and that his work varied, at this point in time, between factual representations and semi-abstract interpretations of scenes. His "Southern Autumn" serves as a marker of the abstract shift, as a poetic study of form and color.¹³⁸ One reviewer of the Delgado exhibition, Carter Stevens, describes Reinike's ability to know restraint when it best suits his purpose, and when a documentation of the bare facts is needed. It was this chameleon effect that allowed him to be successful in drawing the viewer into each scene he painted. Stevens continues to state that Reinike's work was "of a man who loves the variety of a diversified world. In seeing this show one seems to travel with him among the highways and byways of

¹³⁸ Undocumented newspaper clipping of review in New Orleans, written by Carter Stevens, January 30, 1947, from the personal files of Charles H. Reinike III, Reinike Gallery. "Southern Autumn" was sold in 1947 to Albert A. Hopfennitz of 4336 State St. Dr. Its whereabouts are now uncertain.

town and country.”¹³⁹ The review of the 1947 exhibition reveals that Reinike’s experimentations with abstraction were already well under-way by this time.

Analysis of Transitional Works

Reinike dabbled in Cubist-inspired works in the late 1940s, which shows that he did not leap into abstraction on a whim; rather he experimented with a variety of styles. These Cubist-inspired paintings (Figure 45) reflect his first attempts to execute large watercolors framed without glass, which was an important technical development.



Fig. 45. Charles H. Reinike, Untitled, c. 1948, watercolor on rag illustration board, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling

Reinike’s innovative technique of mounting the watercolor on boards, framing them without glass, encouraged better viewer interaction with his watercolors, which the artist believed was paramount to the paintings’ success.¹⁴⁰ His experimentation with shapes and form are notable in many of the sketches and paintings of these years.

Reinike’s painting style began to shift slowly after a period of relatively stable and balanced foundation of traditional compositions. In an artist’s statement, probably written in the early 1970’s, Reinike confessed the following:

¹³⁹ Undocumented newspaper clipping of review in New Orleans, written by Carter Stevens, January 30, 1947, from the personal files of Charles H. Reinike III, Reinike Gallery.

¹⁴⁰ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 2, 2013.

After many years of painting the traditional – portraits, landscape compositions – I found my work was no longer expressing my thoughts. Someway I must create in color and design all that I now felt, rather than all that I saw. I wanted to show the constant change that goes on in all living things, the beauty that exists in the minute, because they are miniatures of the universe, the mystery of all rather than the visual reality of the one. I want an audience to feel this mystery with me.

My search to do this must continue for in this way alone can I express my individuality.

I was trained/taught to draw and paint traditionally perspective – cast, figure drawing, painting – I am very glad to have had this disciplined training. For years I painted portraits, landscapes compositions in the traditional manner, until I felt these no longer expressed my thoughts. Now my desire is to create in color and design the mystery of all that I felt rather than all that I see. I want each painting to express the constant change of all living things; the eternal search for perfection. I want an audience to be creative, too.¹⁴¹

For Reinike, a lover of the details of nature, abstraction allowed him to express the outer world from his inner mind. Painted in 1948, *One of You Shall Betray Me* (Figure 46) resonates with the spirituality of his abstractions, but also incorporates the figured components stylistically reminiscent of his earlier works.



Fig. 46. Charles H. Reinike, *One of You Shall Betray Me*, 1948, oil on masonite, 48” X 78”, Reinike Gallery, Collection of Charles Reinike III

¹⁴¹ Artist’s statement handwritten on Vera Reinike stationary by Charles H. Reinike and verified by his children, c. 1970, Courtesy of Charles Reinike III.

These experiments gradually transitioned into attempts to capture the spirit, rather than the semblance of the form. *One of You Shall Betray Me* offers a rare glimpse into the artist's religious beliefs and personal anxieties. Reinike's version of the Last Supper places the viewer in the position of Christ, looking down the table towards Judas. This is not a common visual interpretation of the Biblical event. During the creation of *One of You Shall Betray Me*, Reinike was experienced personal trauma during this time because his sister, Hilda, had died the previous year of a tragic illness. Reinike was also pessimistic because his father had died at age forty-two, his sister also died at age forty-two, and he feared the same fate in his forty-second year. This uncharacteristically dark painting, completed in 1948 by Reinike, depicts his ability to reflect his own mood into his works. Most significantly, anxiety about death may have actually encouraged Reinike to make the transition towards a more spiritually based type of art.

By 1950, his style had transitioned farther from the naturalism of his earlier watercolor images and closer towards abstraction. An oil painting, *These I Remember (Batture Dwellers)*, exemplifies this hazy, loosely painted stylistic shift that occurred during this period of Reinike's artistic production (Figure 47).



Fig. 47, Charles H. Reinike, *These I Remember (Batture People)*, 1950, oil painting, Reinike Gallery, Collection of Charles Reinike III

The batture dwellers inhabited a shantytown founded in the 1930s, nicknamed the “Depression Colony,” which was located between Carrollton Avenue and the Jefferson Parish protection levee. They built their houses on driftwood, which they salvaged from the Mississippi River, constructing their shacks on stilts to protect from rising waters. Their motivation lay in the financial benefits of the batture, as it was considered to be a part of the river and thus property of the United States.¹⁴² Therefore, their homes were beyond the reach of taxation or local ownership, which in the Depression era was surely attractive. Reinike’s interpretation of this West Bank colony includes portraits of his wife and son Charles crossing a dock, stepping towards the swirling river waters and debris ahead of them.

The Goldfish (Figure 48) is perhaps the best example of the transitional phase of Reinike’s move towards abstraction.



Fig. 48. Charles H. Reinike, *The Goldfish*, c. 1955, watercolor on rag illustration board, 32 x 7.5 inches, Collection of Charles Reinike III

¹⁴² Federal Project of the W.P.A. *New Orleans City Guide*. New Orleans, LA: Federal Writers Project of W.P.A. for the City of New Orleans, 1938.

Reinike's abstractions were far from accidental, always maintaining control of the medium and composition. *The Goldfish* showcases his ability to include hidden elements of realism, which are manifested in the form of several hazy goldfish forms, which swim effervescently down the composition, near the top left corner of the painting. A precursor to what would come, *The Goldfish* blurs the boundary line between Impressionism and abstraction.

The Goldfish also indicates a growing interest in Asian themes. The Asian tendency to capture the spirit rather than the semblance of an object resonated with Reinike's artistic approach.¹⁴³ Reinike agreed wholeheartedly with the Asian tenet that the function of a painting is not to display blatantly, rather to suggest form.¹⁴⁴ Traditional Japanese and Chinese watercolorists believed that the beautiful arises from within the paint, but that it should be concealed. The Asian artistic approach, geared towards interpretation of a subject, rather than mere representation, is apparent in *The Goldfish*. All of these techniques would have struck a chord with Reinike, who surely was inspired by the Oriental painters, due to his broad academic training.¹⁴⁵ Reinike turned to the poetic imaginings of the Oriental Zen philosophers and began producing paintings that suggested form and mood without defining actual events or places.

The Chinese-American artist Chen Chi (1912-2005), who visited New Orleans in the early 1950s, was also a defining influence upon Reinike's abstractions, as well as his interest in modern Chinese art.¹⁴⁶ Chen employed a combination of Impressionist and traditional Chinese watercolor techniques, and his diversity of style must have reverberated with Reinike's own objectives. Some of Reinike's paintings of the early 1950s maintained a naturalistic style, while

¹⁴³ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 14, 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Martha Smathers and Candler Cheney, *Modern Art in America* (New York: Whittlesey House, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Incorporated, 1939), 216.

¹⁴⁵ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 22, 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Charles H. Reinike III, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, Reinike Gallery, Atlanta, GA, February 3, 2013. According to Charles H. Reinike III, his father was familiar with and admired Chi's watercolors greatly, and he can remember him praising Chi's style.

others became more abstract. Chen, who had the honor of designing the cover and inside illustrations for *Collier Weekly's* special edition Mardi Gras publication in March 1952, always maintained a lyrical approach to capturing the world around him. The exact nature of the relationship between Chen and Reinike is unclear, but according to his family, the two artists did know each other and Reinike always spoke highly of Chen's work. Both artists showcased a reverence for watercolor as a delicate and effective painting medium, as well as a modern approach to this art form.

Reinike's growing interest in Asian art and abstraction magnified his consideration of the glittering effects of atmosphere and light, always present in even his earliest works. In one sketch for a painting (Figure 49), Reinike even directly incorporates a strong cultural emblem of Asian culture: the pagoda. The towering structure's form, color, and light are given the same careful attention as reflected in Reinike's earlier paintings, but a stronger interest in blurring reality through the incorporation of atmospheric perspective is revealed.



Fig. 49. Charles H. Reinike, Oriental sketch, n.d., pencil on paper, 8.5 X 2.75 inches, Collection of Charles Reinike III

On a more technical level, two aspects of Reinike's paintings reflect Asian influence: the vertical format and his signature. Many of his abstractions took on a vertical composition, echoing the aspects of traditional scroll watercolors of the East. Reinike's signature was always penned in a bright red pigment, which was also the approach of many Chinese watercolorists. This choice of pigment related to his name, Reinike, which can be connected to the traditional European allegorical tales of the red fox, Reynard the Fox, or '*Reinike Fuchs*.'¹⁴⁷ In the 1950s, however, Reinike's adopted a new signature, with the addition of a symbol of faux Asian design. *In the Beginning* (Figure 50) is a triptych representing the birth of the universe.¹⁴⁸



This new signature (Figure 51) accompanies
Fig. 50. Charles H. Reinike, *In the Beginning* triptych, n.d., watercolor and acrylic on illustration board, 32 X 35.5 in., Collection of Charles Reinike III



Fig. 51. Charles H. Reinike, detail of *In the Beginning* triptych, n.d., watercolor and acrylic on illustration board, Collection of Gretchen Reinike Eppling
 Reinike's interest mystic forms and the golden

light of a dream world, resonating with attempts made by Asian watercolorists. For Reinike, who studied the history of art extensively, it only makes sense that his work was inspired in part

¹⁴⁷ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal Interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 21, 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 21, 2013.

by the techniques of the ancient artists who championed watercolors in Asia long before the medium was developed in the West.

Abstractions of the 1950s and 1960s

Reinike's unusual technique of mounting and framing his watercolors on paper mounted upon wood, without glass placed on top was done because he felt that the glare interfered with the subtleties of the work. Shortly thereafter, he also began experimenting with the texture and consistency of his paint. Reinike soaked his specially procured rag paper in water, and then stretched it upon panels of primed birch board. This process resulted in a delicate network of creases, which Reinike learned to incorporate and take advantage of within each composition. *Liberté* (Figure 52), a tribute to France and its patriotic colors, was an early experiment with mixed media.¹⁴⁹



Fig. 52. Charles H. Reinike, *Liberté*, c. 1965, watercolor and acrylic gesso on illustration board, 32 X 35.5 inches, Collection of Charles Reinike III

As a combination of mostly watercolor with some oil and acrylic, this characterized the paintings Reinike produced between, approximately, 1962 and 1968. *Liberté* utilized acrylic gesso for the white on a surface of rag illustration board, which fixed the paint to the surface and

¹⁴⁹ Charles Reinike III, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, Atlanta, Reinike Gallery, February 10, 2013.

kept it stable. Some of the later abstraction also involved mixed media, combining watercolor, acrylic, and oil, to obtain the best color and texture available.

Reinike's abstractions are preoccupied with floating nebulous forms, serving as marked departures from the true-to-life watercolors of his previous years. These paintings, now belonging to the imagined world of dreamscapes, shroud clarity in ways that recall the gentle blur of faded memories, such as in *Night People* (Figure 53). Faces seem to emerge out of a foggy atmosphere, shrouded in mystery.



Fig. 53. Charles H. Reinike, *Night People*, n.d., watercolor on rag paper on illustration board, 36 X 36 inches, Collection of Charles Reinike III.

Reinike's abstract paintings suggest glimpses of ethereal figures and misty scenes in ways that evoke many possible interpretations. Reinike strove to keep interpretative options open for his viewers, who bring their own personal experiences to the meaning of the work.

At some point, however, Reinike seemed to grow tired of the abstractions he had moved towards, and gradually returned to a middle-ground of figurative scenes, infused with abstract elements. Gretchen Reinike Eppling believes that he was motivated to return to the more

figurative approach due to Vera's death in 1969.¹⁵⁰ Vera enjoyed the figurative work, and Reinike may have returned to this style as a personal homage to his beloved wife. Reinike said that abstraction gave him little satisfaction, and he spent the remainder of his days focusing on the more figurative style that Vera would have appreciated.

¹⁵⁰ Gretchen Reinike Eppling, Personal interview with Lauren Barnett, St. Francisville, March 22, 2013.

CONCLUSION: REINIKE'S ROLE IN LOUISIANA'S ARTISTIC HISTORY

Charles H. Reinike's position outside of the sphere of the avant-garde New York artistic realm in the middle of the twentieth century certainly had its consequences. Little of the art created in Louisiana was nationally esteemed, which sadly remains the case today. Throughout the course of this research effort, the biases and pre-conceived assumptions about Louisiana art have been astounding. Even within the cultural institutions of the state that claim to protect and promote it, the overarching tendency is to flippantly disregard the visual art produced in Louisiana as a lower form not worthy of national recognition. Specifically, the dismissive attitude towards the art produced in New Orleans is unfortunate, especially because a wealth of artists there, including Reinike, have created astonishing works that have pushed boundaries and stimulated the senses.

Although Louisiana may seem far removed from the artistic incubator of Manhattan, this does not mean that artists of the state are naïve provincials. Reinike's early educational experience in Chicago in the 1920s, as well as the diversity of artists working and visiting New Orleans, brought him close to the contemporary art currents. Shining brightly among this group of modern New Orleans artists, Charles H. Reinike showcased much originality and innovation throughout his career. Fellow New Orleans artist and Louisiana State University professor Conrad Albrizio declared:

The South should supply a rich nucleus for what will ultimately constitute the true American art. Art should not be regarded as a luxury or an appendage, but in its proper light as an integral part of national and regional culture...The goal of the Louisiana artist should be to evolve a distinct and interpretive type of southern art.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ "Louisiana Artist Appointed to Staff," Undocumented newspaper clipping, 1936, Vertical Files (Artists), Humanities Division, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University.

Constantly challenging himself to experiment, Reinike stood as one such artist who possessed the talent to develop a distinctive style all his own. Reinike's altruistic spirit positioned him as a worker and teacher whose insights reached many in Louisiana, although his own recognition in the state's artistic history may have been lost due to this selfless approach to his career.

Charles H. Reinike II developed a distinctive style as a plein-air watercolorist, exhibiting great skill with the delicacies of the wet-on-wet technique. He was passionate about the Louisiana wetlands and plantation country, working in nature to give a complete rendering of the scene at hand. Reinike loved depicting rural Louisiana life and was remarkable for his chronicles of the early African-American cabins and for attempting to represent the black lifestyle in an honest and simple way. He also portrayed the residential and industrial landscapes of New Orleans and the Mississippi River. The beauty of the bayou and the industry on the water were common subjects for him, and the many facets of Louisiana came to life in his paintings.

Reinike's wife, Vera W. Reinike, encouraged his goal of leadership in the New Orleans arts community. A respected artist in her own right, Vera would prove to be a guide for her husband throughout his career, and their ambitions were realized together. Working often as a team, the artistic couple approached the New Orleans community with energetic passion for the pervasive enjoyment of art. The establishment of their art academy in 1930 on Toulouse Street, along with the summer art colony a couple of years later, ensured their adherence to the artistic milieu of the era.

From the mid-1930s until the 1950s, Reinike enjoyed the benefit of receiving commissioned work in a variety of different mediums, alongside his watercolors. In the mid-1950's, he shifted to work on almost exclusively abstract compositions and experimented with different paints and techniques. This transitional period marked an interesting time in Reinike's

personal life, which was explored in the final chapter of this analysis. Reinike strove at this point in his career to be free to experiment with pure color, texture, and form. Gradually, however, he added suggestions of form, as well as hidden figures moving in and out of view. The abstractions marked a clear delineation from the realm of daily life, shifting to a dream world of the imagination, instead. Always bold, Reinike brought a heightened level of creativity and formal skill to the New Orleans art scene, passing it along to his many students over the years.

With the passionate eye of a preservationist, but the progressive thoughts of a modernist, Reinike's paintings settle in the middle to reveal the details of the present. His major impact on Louisiana's art scene from the early 1930s until his death in 1983 is remarkable and should not be forgotten. Reinike believed wholeheartedly in the exceptional character of his hometown of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana. Keenly attuned to his surroundings, Reinike used art to beautify spaces, uplift spirits, and improve society. Echoes of Reinike's contributions still reverberate throughout the state today, and a new generation of artists who appreciate Louisiana's culture has emerged to continue his efforts.

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APPENDIX

A List of Some of Charles H. Reinike's Prizes and Distinctions:

The Charlotte Mint Museum of Art prize for the best watercolor, awarded to "Corner Light."
Southern States Art League, second prize, watercolor, 1936
New Orleans Art Association, prize for oil, 1937
Medal for "best painting in exhibition," Mid-South Fair, Memphis, Tennessee
Third popular prize, oil, for "Let There Be Light," New Orleans Art Association, 1940
First prize watercolor, New Orleans Art Association, 1940
Purchase prize, 20th Anniversary of the Southern States Art League, Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina, 1940
First prize watercolor and second prize etching, New Orleans Art League, 1941
First prize Watercolor and Popular Prize Oil, New Orleans Art Association, 1941
First Prize Oil, Outdoor Show, New Orleans, 1941
Second Prize, Water Color, "Box Step Gossip," Forty-Fourth Annual Exhibition of the Art Association of New Orleans, 1945
Silver Medal, Best Painting in Exhibition, New Orleans Art League, 1945, for "Autumn"
Third prize, New Orleans Art League Exhibition, 1946

Solo exhibitions:

Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans, January 7-January 31, 1947
Municipal Art Gallery, Jackson, Mississippi
Eastman Memorial Museum, Laurel, Mississippi
Louisiana Art Commission Gallery, Baton Rouge
Women's Club, Shreveport, Louisiana
Louisiana State Museum, "Documenta: Louisiana Watercolors 1930-1940 by Charles Reinike,"
Presbytere, April-September 1971

VITA

Lauren Barnett was born and raised in Gainesville, Florida. She attended the University of Florida where she acquired a Bachelor of Arts in Art History with a minor in Anthropology in 2011. During her undergraduate studies, she worked with several departments at the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, gaining a diverse background within the museum environment. Lauren moved to Baton Rouge to continue her studies in art history, where she quickly became passionate about Louisiana's rich artistic culture. She has served as the LSU Museum of Art's Curatorial Assistant during the entirety of her graduate studies. She expects to earn her Master of Arts in Art History in May of 2013.