

# The Poya paintings of Gruyère

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## La Gruyère Art and Culture

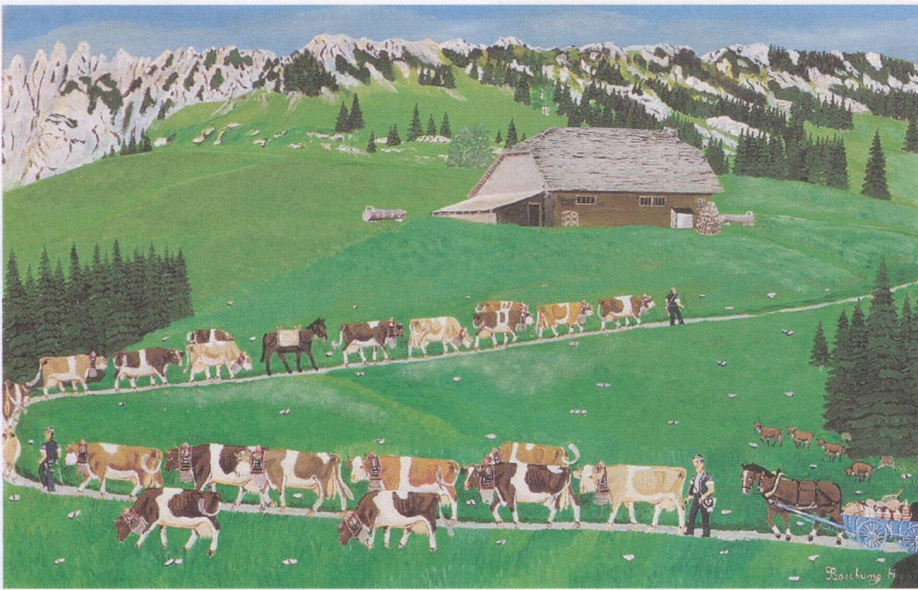


Photo © Franck Auberson

### The Poya paintings of Gruyère

*“Poya paintings” are famous in the Gruyère region and are a style of traditional naïve folk painting. They are similar to the perhaps better known “Täfel-Malerei” or “Senntumsmalerei” found in the Appenzell and Toggenburg.*

Originally, poya was an inventory of the herd, painted during the procession up to the mountain pastures – where painting took the place of writing. They were hung on the front walls or over the windows of farmhouses as a sign of prosperity. About 800 of them have been counted in the Gruyère region.

In the dialect of Fribourg, the simple two-syllable word poya describes the ritual of driving cows up the mountain to graze. The term has been applied to the depiction of this time-honoured rural tradition marking the start of the productive season from the 1960s,

although poyas first started to appear on the façades of farmhouses in the alpine foothills of Fribourg in the early 19th century. Each farmer would portray his own herd in its finest hour, namely in the first flush of springtime. The poya shows a line of cattle processing up a long and winding trail, surrounded by other farm animals, herders in tall hats and other elements that typify life on an alpine farm.

Sylvestre Pidoux (1800-1871), born in Vuadens, is considered to be the first painter of this genre. His works have served as an enduring template



Photo © La Gruyère Tourisme



Photo © La Gruyère Tourisme

Poya painting on farmhouses

for a style that has evolved in line with changes in the alpine economy and livestock preferences. There are several hundred poyas on farmhouses in the region today and fifteen or so painters capable of creating them. While ever fewer people are rearing cattle in the mountains, poyas are enjoying renewed popularity and finding a whole new audience. Their decorative qualities are proving to be a draw for tourists, and they have passed over into interior design as well as a variety of different media.

By Tanja Latham

Source: [www.la-gruyere.ch/en/poya.html](http://www.la-gruyere.ch/en/poya.html)

### The Poya Festival of Estavannens

“The Estavannens Poya” was organised by the Association gruérienne pour le costume et les coutumes (Gruyerian Society for Costumes and Customs) for the first time in May 1956 at Estavannens. The festival was to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the publication of a poem published by Étienne Fragnière on the ascent of cows to the mountain pastures on 21st May 1851. Today, the five-day event is celebrated with food, music and tradition, and culminates on Sunday in the procession of the cows, other livestock and their handlers. The festival has since been repeated several times - in 1960, 1966, 1976, 1989, 2000 and 2013.

[www.la-gruyere.ch](http://www.la-gruyere.ch) Photo © Pierre Schwaller

