



# PAUL GAUGUIN (1848-1903) HIS LIFE AND WORK

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- Introduction:
  - Fire exit and toilets.
  - I studied nineteenth century British and French art for my masters at the Courtauld and I am now a Tate Guide and private art lecturer.
- Schedule:
  - 10:30-11:20 His early life and work
  - 11:20-11:40 Tea and Coffee Break
  - 11:40-12:30 Tahiti
- This talk was inspired by two exhibitions of Gauguin's work, *Gauguin Portraits* at the National Gallery and *Gauguin and the Impressionists* at the Royal Academy. Today I am going to take you through his life roughly chronologically and illustrate each stage with representative works. I will focus on his paintings rather than his sculptures.
- Gauguin is a misunderstood artist as we often associate him simply with his Tahitian figure groups. In the first half I will describe his life prior to his first visit to Tahiti.
- He is also a contentious person to deal with because of his much-discussed **misogyny, wife beating, racism and pedophilia** but he was a very influential Post-Impressionist artist so I will describe his life and work as neutrally as I can without judgmental opinions.
- Let us start at the beginning and take it a step at a time...

## **NOTES**

### **Recent Exhibitions**

- *Gauguin Portraits* (NG, 7 Oct – 26 Jan 2020)
- *Gauguin and the Impressionists: Masterpieces from the Ordrupgaard Collection* (RA Spring 2020)

### **Paul Gauguin (Paris, 1848-1903)**

- Born in Paris in 1848 during the revolutionary upheavals.
- Gauguin's idolised his maternal grandmother.

### **Marriage (1873)**

- Marriage, three children and move to Copenhagen.

### **First Paintings (1873-1885), Family Life in Paris (1873-84)**

- He became a stockbroker.
- *Portrait of Madame Gauguin*, c. 1880-81, Foundation E.G. Bührle
- *Study of a Nude (Suzanne Sewing)*, 1880, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek

### **Family Life in Rouen (1884)**

### **Family Life in Copenhagen (1884)**

### **Dieppe (1885)**

### **France 1885-86/87 Artist's colony, Pont Aven Brittany**

- *Women Bathing*, 1885, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo

### **Cloisonnism and Synthetism**

- *Vision After the Sermon (Jacob wrestling with the angel)*, (1888)
- *The Yellow Christ*, 1889 Buffalo

### **Trip to Martinique (1887)**

- *Bord du Mer II*, 1887, private collection

### **Pont Aven (1888)**

### **Gauguin and Van Gogh (1888)**

### **Gauguin and Degas**

- *Riders on the Beach*, 1902, Museum Folwwang

### First Visit to Tahiti (1890-93)

- *Vahine no te tiare (Woman with a Flower)*, 1891, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek
- *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, 1892, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

### Return to France (1893-95), Pont Aven

- *Annah the Javanese*, (1893), Private collection

### Residence in Tahiti (1895-1901)

- *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897, oil on canvas, 139 x 375 cm (55 x 148 in), Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
- *O Taiti (Nevermore)*, 1897, Courtauld Institute

### Marquesas Islands (1901-03)

- *Le Sorcier d'Hiva Oa (Marquesan Man in a Red Cape)*, 1902, Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain de Liège
- *Self portrait*, 1903, Kunstmuseum Basel

### Death and his Legacy (8 May 1903)

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<https://www.nga.gov/features/slideshows/gauguin-maker-of-myth.html>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/paul-gauguin-1144/exclusive-interview-gauguins-great-grand-daughter> an interview with his great grand-daughter

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/books/chap1/paulgauguin.htm>

Paul Gauguin (Paris, 1848-1903), *Self-Portrait or Man in a Toque*, c. 1875-77, Harvard Art Museum



## Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), *Self-Portrait or Man in a Toque*, c. 1875-77, Harvard Art Museum

- This is his self-portrait. His full name is **Eugène Henri Paul Gauguin** (1848-1903, died aged 54) and this was painted when he was about 28. He was an amateur artist at this time and did not become a full-time artist until 1882 when he was 34 and he was self-taught. He died when he was 54 so he had only **twenty years as an artist**, the last 12 years in and around Tahiti.
- He was egotistical, charismatic, and outspoken. He would tell tales of himself that were exaggerated and mostly fabricated to attempt to create an exotic public image. He presented himself as a savage—wild, free and primitive. He wrote, "**You know I have Indian blood, Inca blood in me, and it's reflected in everything I do.... I try to confront rotten civilization with something more natural, based on savagery.**" This was of course completely untrue although his family on his mother's side were at one stage wealthy, influential colonialist in Peru. He regarded himself as a heroic outsider suffering on behalf of humanity and seeking deeper truths that went unrecognised.
- He was not recognised as an important artist in his lifetime but thanks to his dealer **Ambroise Vollard** (1866-1939) who organised two important posthumous exhibitions he became **recognised as a leading Post-Impressionist artist shortly after his death.**
- **He was born in Paris in 1848, the year of revolutions** across Europe and this had an immediate impact on his life as his family fled **France** and travel to **Peru** where his mother's family lived. His father decided it was safer for the family to



leave France as the newspaper he worked for was suppressed by the authorities but he died on the journey of a heart attack. When they arrived in Peru his mother, Paul and his sister were welcomed by his mother's family.

## **NOTES**

- Ambroise Vollard was one of the most important dealers in French contemporary art at the beginning of the twentieth century. He provided exposure and emotional support to numerous then-unknown artists, including Paul Cézanne, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Pablo Picasso, André Derain, Georges Rouault, Paul Gauguin and Vincent van Gogh.
- Gauguin was not conventionally religious but religion is an important element in his early work. It is more accurate to describe him as spiritual and interested in all religions but he hated any institution including the church and the clergy who he regarded as hypocrites.

## **BIO:GAUGUIN**

### **EARLY LIFE (1848)**

- He was born in Paris and his birth in 1848 coincided with revolutionary upheavals all over Europe. His father was a liberal journalist who was forced to flee France when the newspaper he worked for was suppressed. His mother was a socialist activist and the daughter of an engraver.
- Gauguin's idolised his maternal grandmother and kept her books with him all his life. She was the illegitimate daughter of an aristocratic Peruvian family that lived in Peru. When his father fled France he went to Peru in the hope of continuing his job as a journalist but he died en route. His mother with Paul and his sister were welcomed by the family and Paul lived a life of luxury with nursemaids and servants until he was six. His early impression of Peru "haunted him the rest of his life".
- His family fell from political power and his mother returned to France. She got a job as a dressmaker in Paris leaving Gauguin with his paternal grandfather.
- Gauguin was sent to local schools and then a prestigious Catholic boarding school. When he was 12 he transferred to a naval preparatory school and then signed on as a merchant marine. Three years later he joined the French navy for two years and when he was in India in 1867 he heard his mother had died.

- In 1871 he returned to Paris and a close family friend secured him a job as a stockbroker at the age of 23. For the next 11 years he was a successful businessman earning the equivalent of about £200,000 a year in today's money including the money he made dealing in the art market. In 1882 the Paris stock market crashed along with the art market and Gauguin decided to pursue painting full-time. During this 11 year period he was painting as an amateur and became a friend of Camille Pissarro and exhibited in the Impressionist exhibitions of 1881 and 1882 although the critics dismissed his work. His work was bought by the dealer Paul Durand-Ruel until the stock market crash in 1882.

## **MARRIAGE (1873)**

- In 1873, he married a Danish woman and they had five children and in 1884 after the market collapse he moved with his family to Copenhagen to become a tarpaulin salesman. He failed as he did not speak Danish and the chief breadwinner became his wife who gave French lessons to trainee diplomats. He tried to earn a living as an artist and moved with his family to Rouen but the venture was unsuccessful. They all moved back to Copenhagen but tensions grew in the marriage and his wife and her family asked him to leave and he returned to Paris in 1885 with his six year old son Clovis.

## **HIS EARLY ART CAREER (1886)**

- He had no money and Clovis fell ill and Gauguin's sister paid for him to be sent to boarding school. He produced little work during this difficult period although *Women Bathing* introduced a theme he returned to later. He sold one painting and when George Seurat became leader of the avant-garde movement Gauguin rejected his Pointillist technique contemptuously and later in the year broke with his friend Pissarro.
- Gauguin spent the summer of 1886 in Pont-Aven in Brittany as it was cheap to live there. He dressed outlandishly and became a success with the young art students who flocked there. He made friends with the artist Charles Laval who accompanied him to Martinique and Panama the following year.
- He painted landscapes and nudes which were clearly indebted to Degas. An English illustrator called Randolph Caldecott produced naive drawings that influenced the young art students and Gauguin. The Symbolist subject matter and the use of pure colour is now called the Pont-Aven School. Gauguin became influenced by the art of Africa and Asia because of its mystical symbolism and vigour.

## **MARTINIQUE (1887)**

- In 1887, after first visiting Panama Gauguin went on to Martinique for the summer accompanied by his friend Charles Laval. He suffered from dysentery and produced only about 12 paintings. He was excited by the exotic location and the natives on the island. His work at this period was brightly coloured, loosely painted and outdoors.

## **VINCENT AND THEO VAN GOGH (1888)**

- On Gauguin's return he exhibited his work and they were seen and admired by Vincent van Gogh and his art dealer brother Theo, whose firm Goupil & Cie was the leading art dealer for avant-garde art in Paris. Theo purchased three works and introduced Gauguin to wealthy clients. Gauguin and Vincent became close friends and they corresponded perhaps helping Gauguin formulate his personal theory of art.
- In 1888, Theo convinced Gauguin to visit Vincent's Yellow House in Arles. Their relationship deteriorated and after nine weeks, on 23 December, according to Gauguin's much later account, Vincent confronted Gauguin with a razor and Vincent later cut off his ear, wrapped it in newspaper and handed it to a woman who worked in a brothel. Vincent was hospitalised the following day and Gauguin left Arles. They never saw each other again but they continued to write and Gauguin even proposed they form a studio together in Antwerp.

## **CLOISONNISM AND SYNTHÉTISME (1889)**

- Cloisonnism is a style used to describe Émile Barnard's work which consisted of flat planes of colour and bold dark outlines. Gauguin appreciated the style and used in 1889 to paint *The Yellow Christ*. His painting later evolved towards Synthetism in which neither form nor colour predominate but each has an equal role. In 1890, Maurice Denis summarised the goals for Synthetism as, "It is well to remember that a picture before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order."

## **EDGAR DEGAS**

- Although Gauguin was friends with Pissarro his greatest influence was Edgar Degas. Gauguin admired his artistic dignity and tact and it became his healthiest, longest lasting friendship that spanned his entire artistic career. Degas bought his work and persuaded the dealer Durand-Ruel to do the same. Gauguin's Durand-Ruel exhibition in 1893 received mixed

reviews and was mocked by Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and his former friend Pissarro but praised by Degas.

## **FIRST VISIT TO TAHITI (1891)**

- By 1890, Gauguin had conceived the idea of making Tahiti his next artistic project. He raised money by selling a few paintings and holding a banquet and benefit concert. He visited his wife and children in Copenhagen for what turned out to be the last time and set sail on 1 April 1891 promising to return a rich man. His idea was to escape from "everything that is artificial and conventional" about European art.
- He was disappointed by the capital Papeete as it was much influenced by French and European culture and he could not afford the lifestyle. He moved to a bamboo hut 28 miles away and painted the Tahitian life. Many of his finest paintings date from this period such as *Fatata te Miti (By the Sea)*, *la Orana Maria (Ave Maria)* and *Vahine no te tiare (Woman with a Flower)*, all 1891. He sent *Woman with a Flower* to a friend in Paris and it was displayed at the Goupil Gallery. He read books on the old Tahitian culture and produced some 20 paintings and a dozen wood carvings of the way he imagined it. He sent nine paintings back to Paris and was told they had been well received but in fact they were unfavourably compared with van Gogh. He ran out of funds and encouraged by his apparent success in Paris he returned with 70 works. He needed state support to gain a free passage home and he was suffering from health problems which may have been early symptoms of cardiovascular syphilis.
- He wrote a travelogue called **Noa Noa** describing his experiences and **he revealed he had married a 13 year-old girl called Teha'amana, who he called Tehura**. She gave birth and in 1893 he left never to see her or the child again. She was the subject of a number of paintings including the celebrated *Spirit of the Dead Watching*.

## **RETURN TO FRANCE (1893)**

- Back in Paris he continued to paint Tahitian scenes and an exhibition held by Durand-Ruel was a moderate success. He adopted an exotic persona wearing Polynesian dress, held a weekly salon and conducted a public affair with a teenager called Annah the Javanese.
- At this point disaster struck. For reasons we don't know he lost the patronage of Durand-Ruel, his main route to market which meant he did not have access to the American market which was starting to buy Impressionist works at elevated prices. He tried to hold an exhibition

himself but it was not a success.

- Gauguin inherited 13,000 francs from his uncle but would only give his wife 1,500 francs. All hopes of a reconciliation with his wife vanished when they quarrelled over the money and neither visited the other.

## **RESIDENCE IN TAHITI (1895)**

- Gauguin failed to raise funds for a return to Tahiti but a friend arranged a cheap passage there and he never saw Europe again. He returned at a low ebb because of critics who attacked his work and his disillusionment with the Paris art scene. He arrived three months later in September 1895 and spent the next six years living, apparently comfortably as an artist-settler near the capital Papeete. He had a steady but slow stream of sales to friends although at one point he had to take a desk job. He built a thatched house with a large studio in a wealthy area 10 miles to the east of Papeete. He owned a horse and trap, took the *Mercure de France* and engaged in a lively correspondence with artist, dealers, critics and patrons in Paris. He played a lively role in local government politics wrote for a local journal called *The Wasps* attacking the governor and the colonial government and eventually published his own newspaper and became paid editor of *The Wasps*.
- For the first year he produced a few sculptures and no paintings. When he resumed painting, it was to continue his long-standing series of sexually charged nudes in paintings such as *Te tamari no atua* (*Son of God*) and *O Taiti* (*Nevermore*) which also included elements of Chritain symbolism. He was now painting for his fellow colonists not the avant-garde in Paris.
- He was hospitalised several times, partly an ankle injury resulting from a pub brawl that never healed properly, partly debilitating sores that opened up on his legs. He described it as eczema but it was probably the progress of syphilis.
- He began a relationship with Pahura (Pau'ura) when she was fourteen and fathered two children of which one died in infancy. The other, a boy, she raised and his descends still live in Tahiti.
- In April 1897 he received news his favourite daughter Aline had died and that he had to vacate his house as the land had been sold. He took out a loan and built a much larger house with beautiful views of the sea. He had over extended himself and the bank threatened to foreclose. Failing health and pressing debts brought him to the brink of despair. At the end of the year he completed his monumental *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, which he regarded as his masterpiece and

final artistic testament (in a letter to Monfreid he explained that he tried to kill himself after finishing it). It was exhibited with other paintings in Paris and was a mild success. He eventually sold *Where Do We Come From?* in 1901 for 2,500 francs. A Paris dealer, Vollard, agreed to pay Gauguin 300 francs a month against 25 unseen paintings a year and provide art materials.

## **MARQUESAS ISLANDS (1901)**

- With a regular income Gauguin was able to move to the Marquesas islands and he spent his final months in considerable comfort. Pau'ura did not come to the island with him as it was too far from her family. He could not continue sculpture as there was no clay available on the island.
- The Marquesas Islands had been ravaged BY European diseases and the population shrank from 80,000 to just 4,000. Catholic missionaries were in control and all the children attended missionary school until their teens.
- Gauguin settled near the capital of the islands although it was small and there was a military doctor but no hospital. The doctor left the island and Gauguin had to rely on two health care workers and his friends. He built a two-storey house that included a studio and held parties every night for the locals. This upset his relationship with the bishop which took a turn for the worse when Gauguin erected a statue of the bishop with his reputed mistress and attacked the missionary school system. Many teenage daughters were withdrawn from the school and one of these was Vaeoho (also called Marie-Rose), the fourteen-year-old daughter of a native couple, who became his mistress. She gave birth to a daughter whose descendants still live on the island.
- The partying stopped and he began a productive period and sent 20 paintings to Vollard in Paris. Gauguin chose to paint landscapes, still lifes, and figure studies at this time, with an eye to Vollard's clientele, avoiding the primitive and lost paradise themes of his Tahiti paintings.

## **DEATH (1903) & LEGACY**

- In 1902 Gauguin's health began to deteriorate, his unhealed ankle became more and more painful until he had to take morphine. His sight was beginning to fail as well and he considered returning to Europe for treatment but a friend advised him to stay for the sake of his art and to keep his enemies silent. *Noa Noa* was finally published and he wrote some other essays. The written attacks on the governor, the bishop and the gendarmerie continued but by December 1902 his health was so poor he

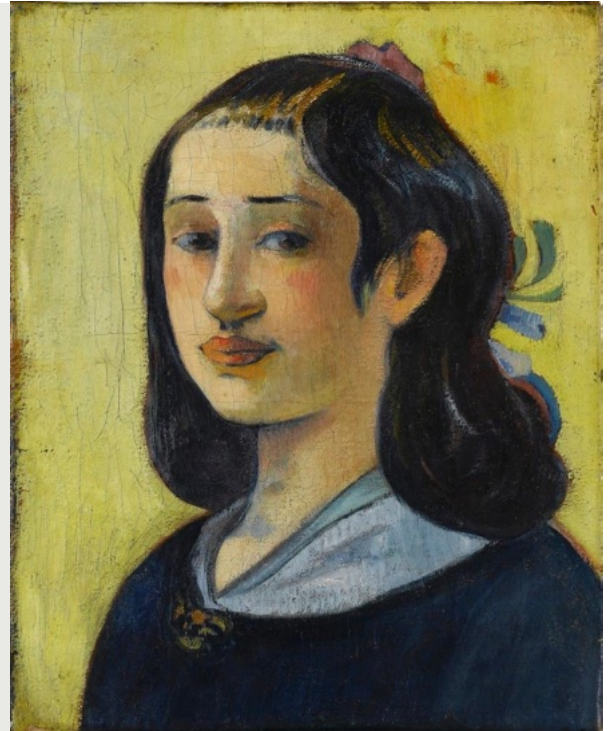


could hardly paint. He began an autobiographical memoir (*Before and After*) which he completed in two months. At the beginning of 1903 he began another attack on the gendarmerie but the allegations could not be substantiated and he was fined 500 francs and three months in prison for libel. He was in such great pain he resorted to morphine again and died suddenly on the morning of 8 May 1903 probably of a heart attack.

- He was buried in the Catholic cemetery and his effects were quickly auctioned leading to the loss of much valuable information about his later years. One small painting of Pau'ura was sold for 150 francs to a naval officer and it was sold at Sotheby's in 2004 for \$39 million.
- Gauguin was the first artist to systematically develop a style of art called Primitivism with exaggerated figures, animal totems, geometric designs and stark contrasts. Like Picasso Gauguin was inspired by the raw power and simplicity of the so-called primitive art of foreign cultures.
- Gauguin is also known as a Post Impressionist because of his bold, colourful and design oriented paintings.
- Gauguin had two posthumous exhibitions at the Salon d'Automne in Paris in 1903 and 1906 and they had a powerful influence on French avant-garde art and on Pablo Picasso in particular.
- Gauguin's initial artistic guidance was from Pissarro, but the relationship left more of a mark personally than stylistically. Gauguin's masters were Giotto, Raphael, Ingres, Eugène Delacroix, Manet, Degas and Cézanne. His own beliefs, and in some cases the psychology behind his work, were also influenced by philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer and poet Stéphane Mallarmé.



Aline Chazal (1825-1869), c. 1840, photograph



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *The Artist's Mother*, 1890-93, 41 x 33 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *The Artist's Mother*, 1890-93, 41 x 33 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Depicted person: Aline Marie Chazal Gauguin (1825-1867)

Aline Chazal (1825-1869), c. 1840, photograph

- This is his mother, a beautiful half-Peruvian woman who died 25 years before he painted this portrait. He based the painting on an old photograph (CLICK) , possibly this one, and he has given the work the aura of a devotional image with its gold background and direct gaze. This was painted just before his first visit to Tahiti which was when he started exploring the theme of womanhood.(CLICK)
- His mother's family were rich and powerful in Peru. **His grandmother** was the illegitimate daughter of a Peruvian aristocrat, so **Gauguin lived a life of luxury until he was six** and it created an "**indelible impressions ... that haunted him the rest of his life**". The images of that tropical paradise stayed with him all his life.
- Gauguin **idealised his grandmother, Flora Tristan**, an important French-Peruvian socialist writer and activist. She helped lay the foundations of the 1848 revolutionary movements. **He idolised her** and she was a major influence on his life; he kept her books with him until the end of his life.
- The family in Peru **fell from political power** and Gauguin returned to France where his mother opened a dressmaker's shop in Paris.
- Gauguin was brought up by his wealthy paternal grandfather in Orléans. From

the age of 11 to 16 he studied at a prestigious Catholic seminary where one of the teachers was the Bishop of Orléans. He devised a catechism (a series of questions and answers) which was "where does humanity come from?" "where is it going to?", and "how does humanity proceed?". It was the 'where' question that lodged in his mind and informed his art as we shall see later.

- But he did not become an artist then. When he was sixteen, he joined a naval college and then signed up for two years and was transferred to India and it was when he was there that he heard his mother had died.
- In 1871, aged 23, he returned to Paris where a close family friend got him a job as a **stockbroker**. For the **next 11 years** he was a **successful businessman** making the equivalent of about **£250,000 a year** including the money he made dealing in the art market. During this time, he was a keen **amateur painter** and painted the self-portrait we just saw.
- He became friends with **Camille Pissarro** and exhibited in the 6th and 7th **Impressionist exhibitions** of 1881 and 1882 and although the critics dismissed his work it was bought by the important art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel (1831-1922). When the **stock market crashed in 1882**, he decided to become an artist full-time.



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *The Embroiderer or Portrait of Madame Gauguin*, 1880, 116 x 81 cm, Foundation E.G. Bührle

Mette Sophie Gad (1850-1920, m. 1873-1894)

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *The Embroiderer or Portrait of Madame Gauguin*, 1880, 116 x 81 cm, Foundation E.G. Bührle

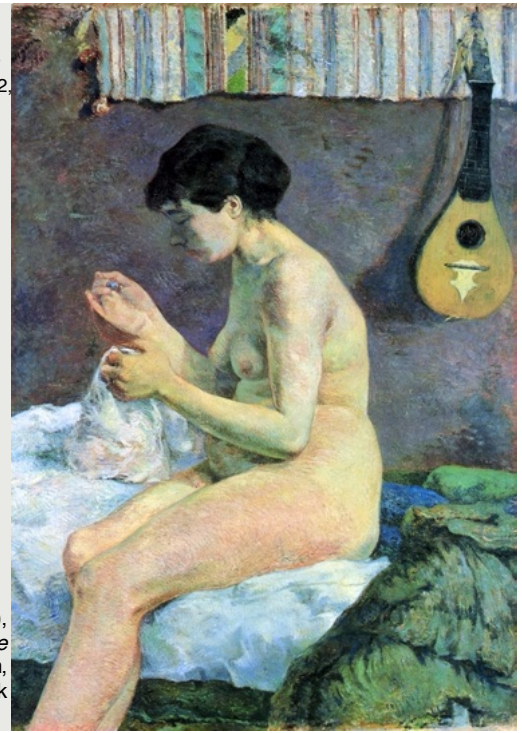
## **MARRIAGE (1873)**

- In 1873, while he was **still a wealthy stockbroker** (at the brokerage firm Bertin) he fell in **love with and married** this woman, Mette Sophie Gad (pronounced 'May-der', b. 1850-1920, m. 1874-1894) a **Danish woman** from a middle-class Danish family (her father was a judge). They married in Copenhagen in 1874 when she was 15 and they had **five children**.
- This was painted seven years into their marriage and two years before the stock market crash when he was still a wealthy stockbroker and amateur artist.
- As I said, he started collecting Impressionist works and became a friend of Camille Pissarro (1830-1903, died aged 73) who influenced his painting style during that early period. It was thanks to Pissarro he was invited to exhibit at the Impressionist exhibition, and he spent the summer of that year with Pissarro learning from the man who would become known as the 'Father of Impressionism'.
- The period 1870-78 was Cézanne's Impressionist period when he was working closely with Pissarro.

## **REFERENCES**

<https://www.trivia-library.com/b/famous-family-history-paul-gauguin-children.htm>





Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Study of a Nude (Suzanne Sewing)*, 1880, 114.5 x 79.5 cm, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Valpinçon Bather*, 1808, 146 x 98 cm, Louvre

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Turkish Bath*, 1862, 108 x 110 cm, Louvre

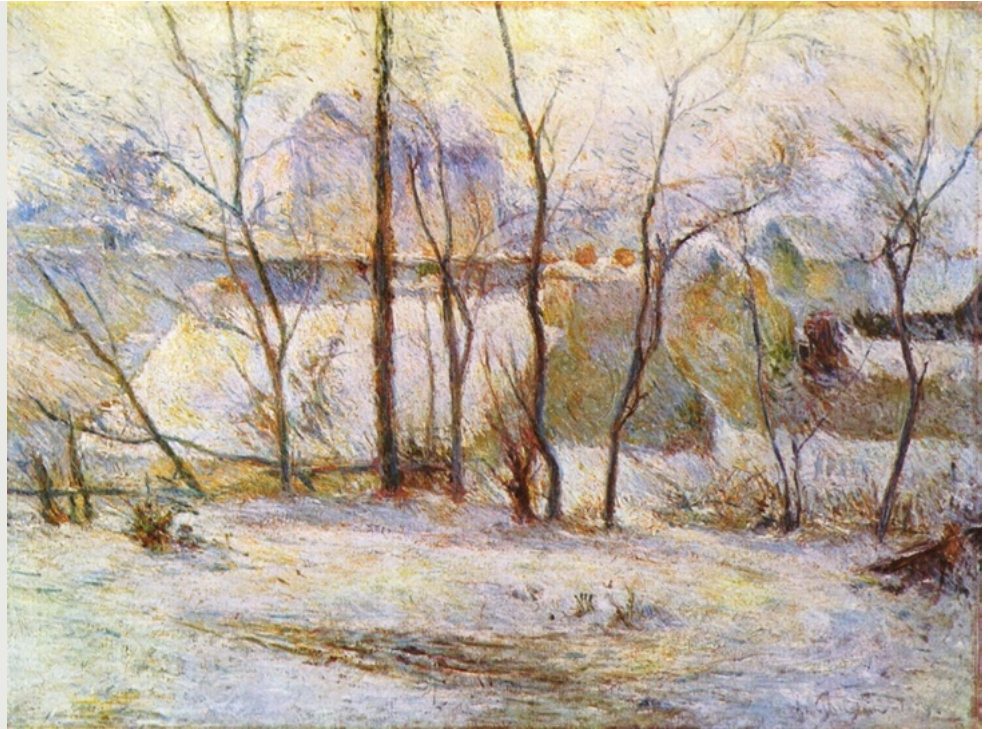
- The same year as he painted the portrait of his wife, he painted this portrait of a pregnant model called Suzanne inspired by (CLICK) one of his favourite painters Jean Auguste Ingres, particularly his *The Valpinçon Bather* of 1808 and *The Turkish Bath* of 1862 in which one of the nudes is playing a mandolin. (CLICK).
- In 1877 he moved his family from an apartment in the centre of Paris (at 15, rue la Bruyère) to a cheaper area across the river and about 6km south. The family lived in style with servants in a comfortable apartment with a garden (the third floor of 8 rue Carcel, Vaugirard). He set up a studio in his home where he painted this life-size portrait. By combining a nude with a domestic scene of everyday life he removed the eroticism and refused to idealise the figure. It **caused a big impact at the Impressionist exhibition** and received some positive reviews but he was unable to sell it and his wife Mette (pronounced 'May-der', Mette Sophie Gad, m. 1873) refused to allow it to be hung in the house. Much later, she sold it to an artist who donated it to the national museum.

## **NOTES**

- His close friend **Émile Schuffenecker** (1851-1934), a former stockbroker who also aspired to become an artist, lived close by. He was a French Post-Impressionist artist, painter, art teacher and art collector. A friend of Paul Gauguin and Odilon Redon, and one of the first collectors of works by Vincent van Gogh. His reputation suffered as he was accused of imitating and even forging works of other artists such as Van Gogh.
- The painting can be seen as Gauguin's **tribute to one of his favourite painters, J.A.D. Ingres** particularly his *Valpinçon Bather* of 1808 (Louvre, pronounced 'val-pan-sonne') and his *The Turkish Bath* (1852-59, modified 1862, Louvre) with a similar figure playing a mandolin and the *Grande Odalisque* (1814, Louvre). Ingres was an important influence on Edgar Degas and Pierre-Auguste Renoir and later Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. Later his work was mocked by the Surrealists and Post-Modern artists. He is now seen as one of the great masters of the early 19th-century French art.



*Garden under Snow (La Neige à Vaugirard II, ou Jardin sous la neige)*, 1879, 60.5 x 81 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest



*Garden under Snow (La Neige à Vaugirard II, ou Jardin sous la neige)*, 1879, 60.5 x 81 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest

- This is ***Garden under Snow*** painted in the area where he lived in Vaugirard (pronounced 'voh-ghee-rah'). Although we think of him as a painter of Tahitian figures he painted a large number of landscapes and many still-lives including flower paintings.
- When this was painted he was a **self-taught 'Sunday painter'**. The impressionist brushwork shows the influence of Pissarro who had been a friend and mentor for the previous five years. Snow scenes were popular with the impressionists as they allowed the exploration of subtle variations in colour and tone with fine transitions from purple to bluish shades. We shall see how Gauguin later broke with the Impressionists and developed his own style.

## **REFERENCES**

<https://en.mng.hu/artworks/garden-under-snow/>



Paul Gauguin and Mette Sophie Gad by Julie Laurberg, 1885, photograph, Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen

Mette Gauguin and Her Children in Copenhagen, c. 1889, photograph

- But then the big life-changing event happened. In 1882 the Paris Bourse (the stock market) collapsed; it was the worst crisis in the French economy in the nineteenth century. Gauguin lost his job and most of his savings and had to move with his family to Rouen where the cost of living was lower. Suddenly the family went from a comfortable upper-middle class existence to no income and living on their savings.
- Mette ('May-der') became dissatisfied and moved back to her parent's house in Copenhagen with the children (CLICK). She later travelled to Rouen and convinced Gauguin to join her in Copenhagen. He found a job as a commission-only tarpaulin salesman to make some money. Needless to say, he failed completely as he did not speak Danish, and no one wanted French tarpaulins. The chief breadwinner became his wife who, with the help of family connections, gave French lessons to trainee diplomats.
- Tensions grew in the marriage and with his in-laws. A letter from Émile says that he saw his father "bloody my mother's face with his fist".
- She and her family asked him to leave, and he returned to Paris in June 1885 with his six-year-old son Clovis (CLICK), threatening to take all the children away from her. By this time, he had been trying to earn a living as a full-time artist for three years but was unable to sell his work.

- Gauguin and Mette were never to live as husband and wife again. Gauguin frequently wrote her letters but for the remaining 23 years of his life he travelled and painted. He saw them once more in 1891.
- Gauguin's children by Mette-Sophie Gad are:
  - Émile (1874–1955), the eldest became a construction engineer in the US;
  - Aline (1877–1897, pronounced 'a-leen'), his favourite daughter who died when he was in Tahiti, named after his mother and his grandmother;
  - Clovis (1879–1900), who he took to Paris;
  - Jean René (1881–1961), who became a sculptor; and
  - Paul Rollon (1883–1961), who became an artist and art critic known as Pola Gauguin. He wrote a memoir, *My Father, Paul Gauguin* (1937). His son Paul Rene Gauguin (b. 1911) is a graphic artist, stage designer, and translator who lives in Copenhagen.
- He outlived two of his children, Aline and Clovis and the other three became artists.
- In Paris, Gauguin had a mistress called Juliette Huet (1866-1955) a young Parisian seamstress who had a daughter Germaine Huet (1891- ?).
- In Tahiti he had many mistresses under the age of 15, most notably and controversially Teha'amana aged 13, who he claimed he married the day they met, and she bore him a son Emile Marae a Tai (1899- ?) who became an artist.

## **NOTES**

- The stock market collapse had a number of causes but the principal one was speculation in the shares of **l'Union Générale** which collapsed in January 1882. The collapse led to a recession which lasted until the end of the decade. The bank blamed the collapse on an anti-Catholic Jewish-German conspiracy of Freemasons but historians now know there was no conspiracy. Seven stockbrokers went bankrupt and 14 of 60 were close to collapse.

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*The Little One Is Dreaming, Etude (La Petite rêve, ou Garçon endormi)*, 1881, 60 x 74 cm, Ordrupgaard, Denmark



*The Little One Is Dreaming, Etude (La Petite rêve, ou Garçon endormi)*, 1881, 60 x 74 cm, Ordrupgaard, Denmark

- This is an early painting of his four-year-old daughter Aline born in 1877, one of his two favourite children. He painted many pictures of his family at this time.
- Note the strange doll on the bed and the dark, ominous birds above her bed. Gauguin is often described as an Impressionist or Post-Impressionist but he may better be described as a Symbolist. Symbolism was a late nineteenth-century art movements that sought to represent absolute truths through metaphorical images. It was a reaction against Realism. The Symbolist Manifesto of 1886 states, "Thus, in this art movement, representations of nature, human activities and all real life events don't stand on their own; they are rather veiled reflections of the senses pointing to archetypal meanings through their esoteric connections."

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<https://museu.ms/collection/object/236436/the-little-one-is-dreaming-tude-paul-gauguin-18481903>



*Women Bathing*, 1885, 38.  
x 46.2 cm, National  
Museum of Western Art,  
Tokyo

*Women Bathing*, 1885, 38. x 46.2 cm, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo

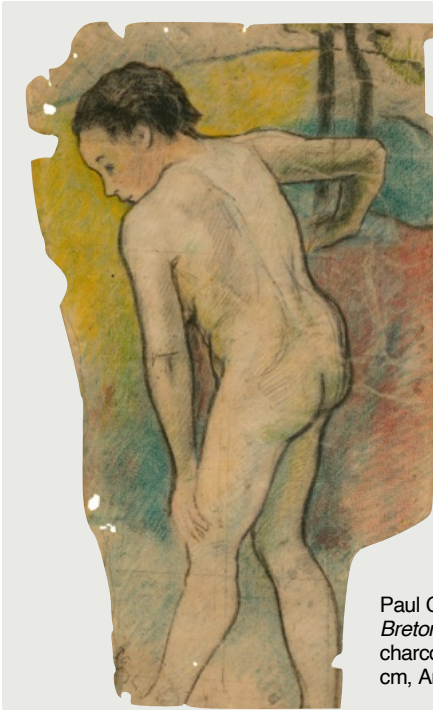
## **HIS EARLY ART CAREER (1886)**

- So, he was in Paris with his son Clovis and had no money Then his son fell ill and Gauguin's sister (Marie) paid for him to be treated and then for him to be sent to boarding school. He produced little art during this difficult period although this painting, *Women Bathing*, introduced a theme he returned to later.
- He exhibited 19 paintings and a wood relief at the eighth and last Impressionist exhibition in May 1886 but he only sold one painting.
- **George Seurat became seen as the leader of the avant-garde movement but Gauguin rejected his Pointillist technique contemptuously and later in the year broke with his friend Pissarro.** It is notable that Gauguin broke many friendly, family and business relationships but the details are unclear. He was apparently an arrogant and very difficult person to deal with.
- He spent the **summer of that year in Pont-Aven in Brittany** as it was cheap to live there. The people were **fervently religious** and it was a long way from the sophistication of Paris.
- Gauguin was **energised** by this rural, what he called '**primitive**' culture. The term 'primitive' was used at that time to refer to any culture outside the capital cities of Europe. It might be used to refer to a rural village, an Arab, African or Asian country or an earlier period, excluding, of course, the classical period. For Gauguin and many other artists it was a term of praise, 'primitive' meant closer



to nature, more honest, more energetic and without the hypocrisy of middle-class society. Perhaps the word 'genuine' is closer to what Gauguin meant by 'primitive'.

- In Pont Aven he **forged a new style** and this painting called ***Women Bathing*** is **transitional** between his old and his new style. It was here as we shall see in a moment that he started to use **colour** not to mimic nature but for its **emotional qualities**.
- He **dressed outlandishly** and became a **success with the young art students** who flocked there.



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903),  
*Breton Bather*, 1886–1887,  
charcoal and pastel, 58.5 × 35  
cm, Art Institute of Chicago



Edgar Degas (1834-1917), *Le Tub*, 1886, pastel on paper, 60 × 83 cm, Musée d'Orsay

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Breton Bather*, 1886–1887, charcoal and pastel, with touches of brush and brown ink, on ivory laid paper (discoloured to tan), partially outlined in graphite and squared in black fabricated chalk, with yellow paint residue on verso, Signed lower left, in charcoal: "P Gauguin"; inscribed upper right, in charcoal: "Marz 87", 58,5 × 35 cm, Art Institute of Chicago

Edgar Degas (1834-1917), *Le Tub*, 1886, pastel on paper, 60 × 83 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- He painted landscapes and nudes which were **clearly indebted to Degas** (CLICK). This is *The Tub*, one of seven pictures exploring the theme of women washing. It was exhibited at the final Impressionist exhibition in 1886. Degas's picture is unlike any previous scene of ladies at their toilette which were idealised. Contemporary critics described its animal-like pose reminiscent of the *Crouching Venus* of antiquity.



Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886), *Children on the Beach*, published in *The Graphic* October 1879



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *La bergère bretonne (The Breton Shepherdess)*, 1886, 60.4 × 73.3 cm, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *La bergère bretonne (The Breton Shepherdess)*, 1886, 60.4 × 73.3 cm, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886), *Children Playing on the Beach*, published in *The Graphic* October 1879

## **PONT-AVEN, BRITTANY**

- The Pont-Aven area of southern Brittany was still one where a 'primitive' way of life was followed and artists were inspired by this lifestyle.
- (CLICK) An English illustrator called Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886, aged 39) produced naive drawings of the area for travel brochures and his style influenced young art students in Pont-Aven including Gauguin, Émile Bernard and Van Gogh although Van Gogh did not visit the town. Caldecott later became well known for his illustrations of children's books. (CLICK)
- But it was **Gauguin who emerged as the intellectual leader** and advocated a style called Synthetism (or Synthétisme pronounced 'san-tay-tiss-ma' or 'sin-thet-ism' in English). The style is characterised by its use of bold colours, rhythmic lines and simplified two-dimensional forms. It was a decorative style that synthesised the subject matter with the artists feelings to evoke a mood.
- Gauguin became friends with Pierre Laval who **went with him to Panama and Martinique the following year...**

## **NOTES**

- An exhibition of 'synthétisme' was mounted by the Pont-Aven artists in 1889 and the 'groupe synthétiste', including Gauguin and **Emile Bernard**, was founded in 1891. Another follower of the movement, **Paul Sérusier** (pronounced 'ser-ooze-e-ay'), **founded the Nabis group**. The group included Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard and Maurice Denis and their bold, simplified style was inspired by Paul Gauguin's Synthetism.

*Martinique Landscape*, 1887, 117 x 89.8 cm, Scottish National Gallery



*Martinique Landscape*, 1887, 117 x 89.8 cm, Scottish National Gallery

## **MARTINIQUE (1887)**

- In 1887, Gauguin and Laval were enticed to Panama where the **Panama Canal was being built by the offer of a lucrative job**. There was no job and they had no money so they had to work as labourers in terrible conditions to earn enough to get a boat to Martinique.
- Unfortunately, while he was there he **caught dysentery** and produced only about twelve paintings. He was excited by the exotic location and the natives on the island. His work at this period started to become brightly coloured, loosely painted and set outdoors.
- It was here that he became inspired by finding an **unspoiled culture and an exotic and sensual surroundings**. However, he found a world that had **already been transformed by western missionaries and colonial rule** so he largely had to invent his own primitive world inspired by his location.
- Notice how his landscape style has changed since his *Garden under Snow* painted eight years previously.
- By this time he was dreaming of **escaping from urban 'civilisation'** and immersing himself in a tropical paradise where he could feel closer to nature and where he believed life would be **more mysterious and more sensuous**.

## **NOTES**

- Martinique is a Caribbean island and an overseas region of France. The painting shows the bay of Saint-Pierre with the volcano Mount Pelée in the background. It is a tropical paradise unmarked by human hand.





*The Painter of Sunflowers,*  
1888, 73 x 91cm, Van  
Gogh Museum

*The Painter of Sunflowers, 1888, 73 x 91cm, Van Gogh Museum*

- Van Gogh's first impression on seeing this painting was that Gauguin had depicted him as a madman. He later softened his view. 'My face has lit up after all a lot since, but it was indeed me, extremely tired and charged with electricity as I was then'.[1]

## **VINCENT AND THEO VAN GOGH (1888)**

- But let us step back. When Gauguin's returned from Martinique he exhibited his work and they were seen and admired by Vincent van Gogh and his art dealer brother Theo, whose firm Goupil & Cie was the leading art dealer for avant-garde art in Paris. Theo purchased three works and introduced Gauguin to wealthy clients. Gauguin and Vincent became close friends and they corresponded perhaps helping Gauguin formulate his personal theory of art. Vincent van Gogh hero-worshipped Gauguin and dreamed of setting up a 'Studio of the South' with him.
- In 1888, Theo convinced Gauguin to visit Vincent's Yellow House in Arles by paying him an allowance. Gauguin's indifference to Vincent turned his hero-worship into anger and after nine weeks. The disagreed about many things but in particular their approach to art was diametrically opposed. Van Gogh thought the artist should confront nature directly and Gauguin thought the artist should work from their imagination. As we shall see most of Gauguin's later works were not painted from nature but developed out of his imagination.
- On 23 December, according to Gauguin's much later account, Vincent

confronted Gauguin with a razor. Gauguin later wrote that he went for a walk in the public gardens when: "I heard behind me a well-known step. Short, quick, irregular. I turned about the instant that Vincent rushed towards me, an open razor in his hand. My look at that moment must have had great power in it, for he stopped and, lowering his head, set off running towards home."

- Vincent later cut off his ear, wrapped it in newspaper and handed it to a woman who worked in the local brothel with instructions to hand to a shy, young prostitute called Rachel. Vincent was hospitalised the following day and Gauguin left Arles. They never saw each other again but they continued to write and Gauguin even proposed they form a studio together in Antwerp.

## **REFERENCES**

[1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Painter\\_of\\_Sunflowers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Painter_of_Sunflowers)



*Vision After the Sermon*, 1888, 73 x 92 cm, Scottish National Gallery

*La Vision après le Sermon* or *La Lutte de Jacob avec l'Ange* (The Vision After the Sermon or Jacob wrestling with the Angel)

- **This is regarded as the first of Gauguin's masterpieces.** It is one of the first to use his signature style of **flat areas of colour** and **an unusual perspective**. It is clearly a work of the imagination and represents a dream described in the Bible.
- It was painted on his second visit to the **highly religious village of Pont-Aven, Brittany**. He had become dissatisfied with Impressionism and **met a young artist called Émile Bernard** (1868-1941) who was painting in a **simplified style** influenced by Japanese prints. Gauguin took the ideas much further and he interpreted the subject matter in a highly personal way. Barnard had a beautiful seventeen-year-old sister called Madeleine that Gauguin, aged 40, fell deeply in love with and some say she is included in this painting on the left and Gauguin included himself on the right. Madeleine was a devout catholic and was so charmed by the Breton villagers that she took to wearing the Breton costume.
- The women are wearing traditional Brittany clothes and they have **just heard a sermon from Genesis** (32:22-32). In the **story of Jacob**, after fording the river Jabbok with his family, he spends a whole night wrestling with a mysterious angel. In a letter Gauguin wrote to Van Gogh he said '**For me the landscape and the fight only exist in the imagination of the people praying after the sermon.**' He uses the **diagonal tree** to separate the real world from the

imaginary.

- Gauguin became **recognised as a leader in a new style called Synthétism** (pronounced 'san-tay-tiss-ma' or 'sin-thet-ism' in English) which aimed to combine the appearance of natural forms with the artist's feelings and express it with simplified forms and colours. It was closely associated with **Cloisonnism** where areas of colour are separated by dark, black outlines invoking *cloisonné* a technique of soldering wires to a base, filling the areas with coloured, powdered glass and then firing it to melt the glass.
- Gauguin felt lonely and misunderstood and often **saw himself as a Christ-like figure**. Like Jacob, Gauguin was struggling with questions of life and death, knowledge and evil and these themes were worked through in his art for the rest of his life.



*Self-Portrait with Halo*, 1889,  
79.2 × 51.3 cm, National Gallery  
of Art, Washington D.C.

*Self-Portrait with Halo*, 1889, 79.2 × 51.3 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

- In 1889 he found **Pont-Aven** had become too crowded and he moved with a group of younger artists to a **small fishing village in Brittany called Pouldu**. He stayed several months until the summer of 1890.
- This is one of the 40 self-portraits he painted in his lifetime and it again shows the influence of Japanese prints and the inclusion of religious symbolism. He presents himself as a saintly figure with two apples representing the tree of knowledge of good and evil and he is holding the serpent that tempted Eve.

## **NOTES**

- In Pouldu Gauguin and the young artists found lodgings in an inn run by Marie Henry and they decorated the walls, ceilings and windows with their art works.

## **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-Portrait\\_with\\_Halo\\_and\\_Snake](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-Portrait_with_Halo_and_Snake)





Émile Bernard (1868–1941), *Self-portrait with Portrait of Gauguin*, 1888, 46.5 × 55.5 cm, Van Gogh Museum



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *The Yellow Christ (Le Christ jaune)*, 1889, Albright–Knox Art Gallery, NY

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *The Yellow Christ (Le Christ jaune)*, 1889, Albright–Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Émile Bernard (1868–1941), *Self-portrait with Portrait of Gauguin*, 1888, 46.5 × 55.5 cm, Van Gogh Museum. Dedicated to Vincent van Gogh - "à son copain [slang for "for his fellow"] Vincent, 1888". Gauguin painted, to "compensate", a self-portrait "with portrait of Bernard" in same year. Both paintings are held by the Van Gogh Museum.

- This is considered one of his **key work of Symbolism**. He had returned from his visit to see van Gogh in Arles and stayed in Pont Aven for about a year with a short visit to Paris.
- He shows the crucifixion of Christ set in nineteenth-century northern France with Breton women surrounding the cross. The bold outlines are typical of the Cloisonnist style. He also painted a self-portrait with the Yellow Christ in the background.
- (CLICK) Van Gogh had asked Bernard for a portrait of Gauguin, but Bernard did not feel able to create a direct portrait (Gauguin, 20 years older [twice the age of Bernard!], was already famous at this time) so he painted a self-portrait with a portrait of Gauguin on the wall. Van Gogh however was totally fond of Bernard's painting, for its simplicity, and compared it to "a genuine Manet".

## **CLOISONNISM AND SYNTHÉTISME (1889)**

- "Under the influence of folk art and Japanese prints, Gauguin's work evolved towards **Cloisonnism**, a style given its name by the critic Édouard Dujardin to

describe Émile Bernard's method of painting with flat areas of colour and bold outlines, which reminded Dujardin of the Medieval cloisonné enamelling technique. Gauguin was very appreciative of Bernard's art and of his daring with the employment of a style which suited Gauguin in his quest to express the essence of the objects in his art" (Wikipedia)

## **REFERENCES**

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Yellow\\_Christ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Yellow_Christ)





Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Self-portrait with Portrait of Bernard*, 'Les Misérables', 1888, 45 × 55 cm, Van Gogh Museum

Utagawa Hiroshige (Ando) (1797-1858), *Moon-Viewing Point*, No. 82 from One Hundred Famous Views of Edo, 8th month of 1857, woodblock print, sheet: 36 x 23.5 cm, Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Anna Ferris

- In return Gauguin painted himself with a portrait of Emile Bernard on the wall.
- **One of the key influences on Gauguin at this time was Japanese prints**, particularly those of **Hiroshige and Hokusai**. He was inspired by the bold, strong outlines, flat colours and decorative patterns, a style that became known as the Pont-Aven School.
- Let me show you an example. (CLICK) In this print by Hiroshige note the flat colours and the way the geisha on the right and the shadow of the figure on the left are cut-off. This is a scene in a brothel in Shinagawa. We see a peaceful scene outside with a harvest moon (the nearest full moon to the autumn equinox, so named as its light enabled farmers to work late gathering the crops). Inside is in disarray with a part completed meal on the tatami mat. The geisha with her lute-like instrument appears to be preparing to leave while the shadow of a woman on the left suggests she is a courtesan and is preparing for bed.(CLICK)

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<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/121696>



Edgar Degas (1834-1917), *Racehorses before the Stands*, 1872, 46 x 61 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Cavaliers sur la plage (I) (Riders on the Beach)*, 1902, 65.6 x 75.9 cm, Museum Folkwang

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Cavaliers sur la plage (I) (Riders on the Beach)*, 1902, 65.6 x 75.9 cm, Museum Folkwang

Edgar Degas (1834-1917), *Racehorses before the Stands*, 1872, 46 x 61 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

## EDGAR DEGAS

- The other influence I have mentioned was **Edgar Degas** (1834-1917). I previously showed you *Breton Bather* influenced by Degas's *The Tub*. This is a much later painting which I am showing you now to emphasise the importance of his relationship with **Degas**.
- (CLICK) This is a Degas in comparison. Gauguin admired Degas's artistic dignity and tact and their relationship **became his healthiest, longest lasting friendship and it spanned his entire artistic career**.
- **Degas bought Gauguin's work and persuaded the dealer Durand-Ruel to do the same**. Gauguin's Durand-Ruel exhibition in 1893 received mixed reviews and was **mocked by Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir and his former friend Pissarro but praised by Degas**.(CLICK)
- This is one of two works painted on the island of Hiva Oa (pronounced 'ee-va oh-ah') **the year before he died**. Two ghostly riders appear to be blocking the path of three horsemen riding along the beach. It is clear that the influence of Degas is still present in his late work.

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*Self-Portrait in a Hat*, 1893, 45 x 38 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- After the break we continue with his life story which from now on is based in or around the isolated Pacific island of Tahiti.
- You can see *Spirit of the Dead Watching* (1892) in the background, reversed.

## **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-Portrait\\_in\\_a\\_Hat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-Portrait_in_a_Hat)

*Hail Mary (la Orana Maria)*, 1891,  
113.7 x 87.6 cm, Metropolitan  
Museum of Art



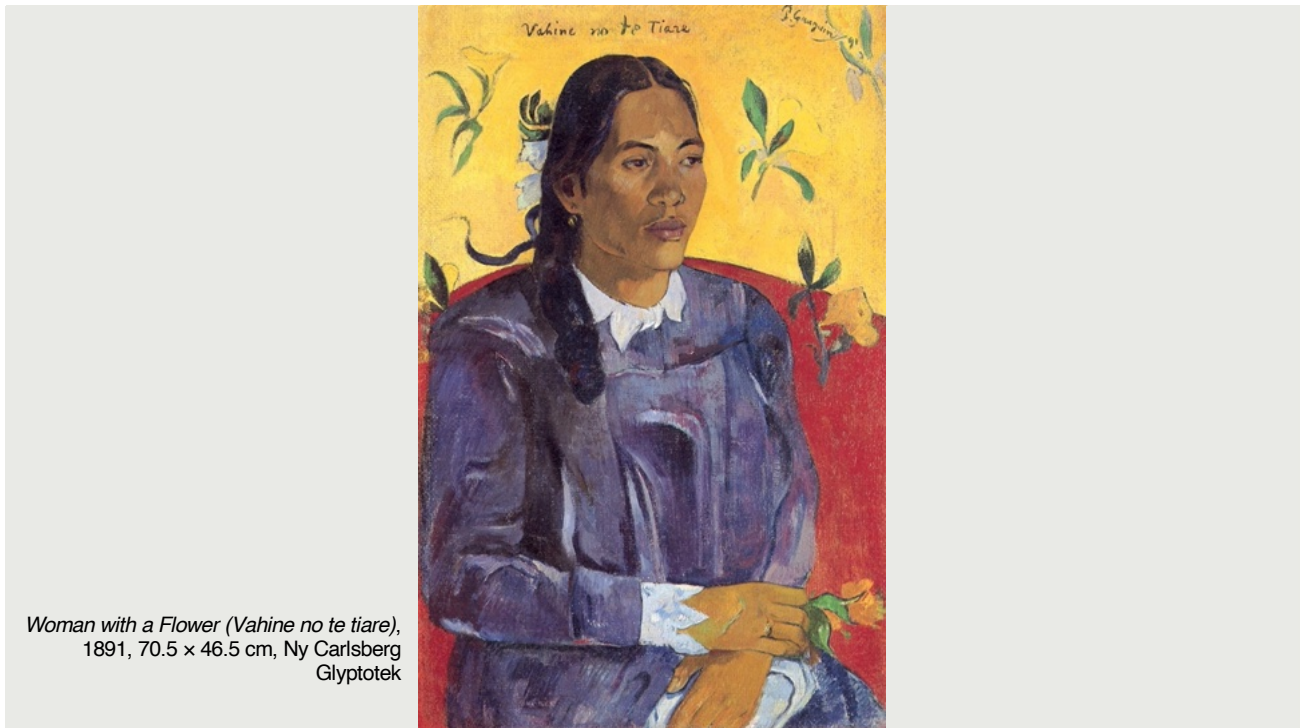
*Hail Mary (la Orana Maria)*, 1891, 113.7 x 87.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

## **FIRST VISIT TO TAHITI (1891-93)**

- **By 1890**, Gauguin was planning to visit the remote Polynesian island of **Tahiti**. He raised money by selling a few paintings and holding a banquet and benefit concert. He visited his wife and children in Copenhagen for what turned out to be the last time and set sail on 1 April 1891 promising to return a rich man.
- He also left behind his pregnant twenty-year-old mistress Juliette Huet. His idea was to escape from "everything that is artificial and conventional" about European art and **produce a new type of art** inspired by an honest culture uncorrupted by civilisation.
- **When he arrived he was disappointed by the capital** Papeete (pronounced 'pa-par-a-tay') as it was much influenced by French and European culture and he could not afford the lifestyle. He moved to a bamboo hut 28 miles away and painted the Tahitian life.
- **This is the first major picture he painted** and it is based on a Christian theme. Gauguin described it in a letter "**An angel with yellow wings reveals Mary and Jesus, both Tahitians, to two Tahitian women**, nudes dressed in pareus, a sort of cotton cloth printed with flowers that can be draped from the waist. Very somber, mountainous background and flowering trees . . . a dark violet path and an emerald green foreground, with bananas on the left. **I'm rather happy with it.**" The composition was inspired by a photograph he owned of a



Javanese temple. The painting is an unusual combination of Catholic symbolism and Tahitian subject matter.



*Woman with a Flower (Vahine no te tiare)*, 1891, 70.5 × 46.5 cm, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek

- Many of his finest painting date from this period such as *Fatata te Miti (By the Sea)*, *la Orana Maria (Ave Maria)* and *Vahine no te tiare (Woman with a Flower)*, all 1891. He sent *Woman with a Flower* to a friend in Paris and it was displayed at the Goupil Gallery.
- He read books on the old Tahitian culture and produced some 20 paintings and a dozen wood carvings inspired by the culture as he imagined it. He sent nine paintings back to Paris and was told they had been well received but in fact they were unfavourably compared with van Gogh.
- He ran out of funds and encouraged by his apparent success in Paris he returned with 70 works. He needed state support to gain a free passage home and he was suffering from health problems.

*Joyfulness (Arearea),*  
December 1892, 75 x 94 cm,  
Musée d'Orsay



*Joyfulness (Arearea),* December 1892, 75 x 94 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- When he returned to Paris the following year (1893) this painting was part of an exhibited at the Durand-Ruel Gallery held to explain his discovery of an exotic world of religious enchantment and beautiful women. However, the exhibition **did not receive the enthusiastic response he hoped for**. The Tahitian titles annoyed people but it was the red dog that provoked the most criticism. Despite this Gauguin considered this one of his best painting and went so far as to buy it back before leaving Europe for good. The red dog looks forward to the work of the Fauves where colour is used to represent feeling.

## **REFERENCES**

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<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/arearea-291>



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Nudes on a Tahitian Beach*, 1892, 90.8 x 64.8 cm, Honolulu Museum of Art



Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), *Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version)*, 1907, 244 x 234 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Nudes on a Tahitian Beach*, 1892, 90.8 x 64.8 cm, Honolulu Museum of Art

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), *Two Nudes*, late 1906, 151.3 x 93 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), *Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version)*, 1907, 244 x 234 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York

- This was painted the same year and shows a simple beach scene.
- It shows the influence his work had on Pablo Picasso. (CLICK) Between 1905 and 1907 Picasso was so influenced by Gauguin that he signed his work 'Paul' as a mark of respect although later he denied Gauguin's influence. The face of the figure on the left of Picasso's painting (CLICK) bears a strong resemblance to that of the figure on the far left in *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) an early masterpiece of modern art. So there is a direct link between Gauguin's work and one of the great masterpieces of the twentieth century and one of the foundation works of modern art.

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*When Will You Marry?*, 1892,  
101 × 77 cm, private collection

*When Will You Marry?*, 1892, 101 × 77 cm, private collection

- Art historian Nancy Mathews wrote that Gauguin "portrayed the [Tahitian] natives as living only to sing and to make love. That's how he got the money from his friends and raised the public's interest in his adventure. But, of course, he knew the truth, which was that Tahiti was an unremarkable island with an international, westernised community".
- It is thought the white Tahitian gardenia behind her ear indicates she is looking for a husband. The other, older, woman behind her has a warning look as the young woman stretches away from her.
- This is one of the paintings he exhibited at the Durand-Ruel Gallery when he returned to Paris but it was met with indifference. Gauguin must have thought highly of the painting as he put a price on it of 1,500 francs, one of the highest prices he assigned.

## **REFERENCES**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When\\_Will\\_You\\_Marry?](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/When_Will_You_Marry?)



*Spirit of the Dead Watching (Manao tupapau)*, 1892, 72.4 x 92.4 cm, Albright-Knox Art Gallery

- He wrote a travelogue called *Noa Noa* describing his experiences and in it he revealed he had married a 13 year-old girl called Teha'amana, who he called Tehura. He claims she gave birth and in 1893 he left for Paris never to see her or the child again even though he returned to Tahiti.
- She was the subject of a number of painting including this one, the celebrated *Spirit of the Dead Watching*. Gauguin said he came home one night to find her in the position with her eyes wide open with fear. Gauguin painted an old woman or ghost seated behind her and he said the title may refer to either the girl imagining the ghost, or the ghost imagining her.
- It should be pointed out that thirteen was the age of sexual consent in France at the time. However, it was considered highly immoral in Tahiti to have two wives and Gauguin was still married to Mette Gad.
- This painting was described by one art historian as "**a veritable encyclopaedia of colonial racism and misogyny**". In his letter to his wife Mette ('may-der') he never mentions she is his lover and it has been suggested that her fear arises from Gauguin's aggressive behaviour which is consistent with his physical abuse of his wife. When he went to French Polynesia it was believed he had syphilis which he gave to the girl. However, recent (2014) forensic analysis of four molar teeth found in a well near his house have been proved to belong to Gauguin but show no trace of mercury which was used to treat syphilis.
- Also, some art historians now suggest that although there was someone called



Tehamana the details, such as his marriage and even the birth were created by Gauguin in his book Noa Noa as an amalgam of various mistresses and women of various ages.

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*What! Are You Jealous?*  
(*Aha Oe Feii?*), 1892, 66.2  
x 89.3 cm, Pushkin  
Museum of Fine Arts

*What! Are You Jealous? (Aha Oe Feii?)*, 1892, 66.2 x 89.3 cm, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts

- In a book he later wrote called *Noa Noa* he wrote, "On the shore two sisters are lying after bathing, in the graceful poses of resting animals; they speak of yesterday's love and tomorrow's conquests. The recollection causes them to quarrel, "What? Are you jealous?".
- This is not the jealousy we are familiar with concerning a threat to an exclusive sexual relationship; it is the result of one sister claiming to have enjoyed sex more than the other the previous night.
- In a letter to a friend Gauguin about this painting he wrote, "I think it is the best of what I've made so far."

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*The Siesta*, 1892-4, 88.9  
x 116.2 cm, Metropolitan  
Museum of Art

*The Siesta*, 1892-4, 88.9 x 116.2 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

- Gauguin was struck by the easy grace of the Tahitian's women and here he captures a moment of communal living. The women are wearing Western clothes, one woman in the back ground is ironing and the others relaxing in the midday heat.
- Gauguin worked on this painting a long time and made many changes, the woman in the foreground had a red skirt, the basket lower right was originally a dog and the woman on the left was further to the left.

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*Annah the Javanese*, (1893),  
Private collection

*Annah the Javanese*, (1893), Private collection

## **RETURN TO FRANCE (1893)**

- In August 1893, he returned to Paris where he continued to paint Tahitian scenes and promoted himself as a wild, savage outsider.
- He adopted an exotic persona **wearing Polynesian dress**, held a weekly salon and **conducted a public affair with a teenager called Annah the Javanese**.
- The exhibition held by Durand-Ruel was not a **success** and at this point **disaster struck**. For reasons we don't know he **lost the patronage of Durand-Ruel**, his main route to market which meant **he did not have access to the American market** which was starting to buy Impressionist works at elevated prices. He tried to hold an exhibition himself but it was not a success. It is possible he blamed Durand-Ruel for the lack of success of the exhibition.
- At this point, **Gauguin inherited 13,000 francs from his uncle** but only give his wife 1,500 francs. All hopes of a reconciliation with his wife vanished when they **quarrelled over the money** and neither visited the other. **They separated in 1894**.





*Breton Peasant Women*,  
1894, 66 x 92.5 cm,  
Musée d'Orsay

*Breton Peasant Women*, 1894, 66 x 92.5 cm, Musée d'Orsay

- **Between his two trips to Tahiti he revisited Pont-Aven.** His figures have become more sturdy and monumental with a clear outline and the women have larger hands and feet and prominent cheekbones. The black outline is characteristic of Gauguin's Cloisonnism. His palette is brighter than when he left with bright yellows, reds and greens. There is a man behind bent double in the field and two women in the distance walking past.
- He wrote to a friend, "In December, I will go back to Paris and I will work every day to sell everything I own... Once I have the capital, I will be off to the Pacific... Nothing will stop me from leaving and it will be for good".

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*Day of the God (Mahana no Atua)*, 1894, 66 x 87 cm, Art Institute of Chicago

*Day of the God (Mahana no Atua)*, 1894, 66 x 87 cm, Art Institute of Chicago

- This was painted in Paris on his return and is more imaginary than real. On the top left two women are bringing offerings to the idol of the Tahitian mother goddess Hina with various rituals being performed for her. In the middle, three figures are placed on a field of pink earth, perhaps symbolising the cycle of birth, life and death. The bottom section consists of dazzling and contrasting hues reflected in water in post-impressionistic style.
- On the right two women are dancing the *upa-upa*, an erotic dance that the colonial authorities had tried to ban.
- The *upa-upa* was originally banned in 1819, by 1849 it was allowed on feast days but without erotic gestures and in 1876 it could only be danced after a license had been obtained and then only on Saturday evenings. Despite all this dancing still went on but by 1894 the old spirit of the dance had long gone. In the 1920s grass skirts (actually hibiscus fibres) were invented and it was not until the international airport opened in 1961 that the *upa-upa* was reintroduced as a tourist attraction.

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Paul Gauguin (1848–1903),  
*The Birth or Son of God*,  
 (Tahitian: *Te Tamari no Atua*), 1896, 96 × 128 cm,  
 Neue Pinakothek, Munich



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *The Birth or Son of God*, (Tahitian: *Te Tamari no Atua*), 1896, 96 × 128 cm, Neue Pinakothek, Munich

## **RESIDENCE IN TAHITI & MARQUESAS ISLANDS (1896-1903)**

- The painting portrays the birth of his daughter, the child of his young Tahitian mistress, Pau'ura (pronounced 'pow-u-ora'). Note the ox and the ass in the background and the halo round the baby's head. The baby died only a few days later on Christmas Day 1896.
- The previous year, in June 1895, Gauguin had failed to raise funds for a return to Tahiti but a friend arranged a cheap passage there and he never saw Europe again. He returned at a low ebb because of critics who attacked his work and his disillusionment with the Paris art scene.
- He arrived three months later in September 1895 and spent the next six years living, apparently comfortably as an artist-settler near the capital Papeete (pronounced 'par-pay-ay-tee'). He had a steady but slow stream of sales to friends although at one point he had to take a desk job.
- He built a thatched house with a large studio in a wealthy area 10 miles to the east of Papeete. He owned a horse and trap, took the *Mercure de France* and engaged in a lively correspondence with artist, dealers, critics and patrons in Paris. He played a lively role in local government politics wrote for a local journal called *The Wasps* attacking the governor and the colonial government and eventually published his own newspaper and became paid editor of *The Wasps*.

- For the first year **he produced a few sculptures and no paintings**. When he resumed painting, he painted this work of Christian symbolism, *Te tamari no atua* (*Son of God*). He was now painting for his fellow colonists not the avant-garde in Paris.
- He was hospitalised several times, partly an **ankle injury resulting from a pub brawl that never healed properly**, partly debilitating sores that opened up on his legs. He described it as eczema but it may have been the progress of syphilis although recent forensic analysis of his teeth found no trace of mercury used to treat syphilis.
- During this period he began a relationship with **Pahura (Pau'ura)** when she **was fourteen** and fathered two children of which one died in infancy. The other, a boy, she raised and his descends still live in Tahiti.



Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *O Taiti (Nevermore)*, 1897, Courtauld Institute

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *O Taiti (Nevermore)*, 1897, Courtauld Institute

- **This disconcerting painting combines beauty and eroticism with a strong feeling of unease.** The young woman is not at rest but anxiously aware of the bird and the strange beings behind her, who may be evil spirits. For modern viewers, the youth of the nude figure, sometimes identified as Paul Gauguin's 15-year-old partner Pahura, is its most unsettling aspect.
- The painting's title associates the bird on the ledge with Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven* (first published in 1845, translated into French in 1875). In it, a poet, driven mad by the death of his lover, hears a raven endlessly repeating 'nevermore'. This **sense of loss** has sometimes been seen as alluding to **Gauguin's disillusionment at the destruction of Tahitian culture by the French authorities**. Instead of the unspoilt paradise he had imagined, he found a society **corrupted by decades of colonialism**. This did not prevent him from **taking advantage of his position as a European coloniser**. Pahura was one of several teenagers that he took on as 'wives'. **The widespread racist fantasy of Tahitian girls as sexually precocious led to their unabashed exploitation.**" (Courtauld website)

## NOTES

- "Paul Gauguin painted *Nevermore* in February 1897, during his second and final stay in Tahiti, an island in the southern Pacific colonised by France. Intended for a white European male audience, the sensual reclining nude belongs to a long artistic tradition. To this familiar theme however, Gauguin

added a sense of exoticism, writing to a friend that his nude is meant to suggest "a certain barbarian long-lost luxury".

## **REFERENCES**

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*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897, oil on canvas, 139 x 375 cm (55 x 148 in), Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897, oil on canvas, 139 x 375 cm (55 x 148 in), Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA

- This is his great masterpiece, *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, which he regarded as his masterpiece and final artistic testament. In a letter to a friend (Monfreid) he explained that he tried to kill himself after finishing it.
- In April 1897 he had received news his favourite daughter Aline had died and then he had to vacate his house as the land had been sold. He took out a loan and built a much larger house with beautiful views of the sea. He had over extended himself and the bank threatened to foreclose. **Failing health and pressing debts** brought him to the brink of despair and it was at this time that he painted this and then attempted to take his own life.
- The painting shows three groups. The group on the right represent the beginning of life, the middle group the daily life of young adulthood including a woman picking fruit as a reference to Eve, and the group on the left Gauguin wrote shows how "an old woman approaching death appears reconciled and resigned to her thoughts"; at her feet, "a strange white bird...represents the futility of words" or "the uselessness of vain words". So overall, from right to left it represents the cycle of 'birth-sin-death'. Outside the cycle the blue idol Gauguin said represents 'the Beyond'.
- It was exhibited with other paintings in Paris and was a **mild success**. He eventually sold *Where Do We Come From?* in 1901 for 2,500 francs. A Paris



dealer, Vollard, then agreed to pay Gauguin 300 francs a month against 25 unseen paintings a year and provide art materials.

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*Le Sorcier d'Hiva Oa (Marquesan Man in a Red Cape)*, 1902, Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain de Liège

*Le Sorcier d'Hiva Oa (Marquesan Man in a Red Cape)*, 1902, Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain de Liège

- A few years later he painted this *Marquesan Man in a Red Cape*. Gauguin had been critical of the exaggerated difference between the sexes in Europe. In Tahiti he comments on the 'androgynous aspect' of the people which he respected and admired. When he first arrived he was called a *taata vahine* (man-woman) because of his shoulder length hair. It was assumed he was a *mahu*, a recognised and accepted male transvestite figure.
- His fascination with this sexual ambiguity is shown in the 'soft-masculine' figures of the women he painted with their solid arms, heavy thighs and masculine calves and the feminised form of the men such as in this later work, a figure that one historian describes as a *mahu*.

## NOTES

- One mystery is that the bird in the jaws of the dog is an unknown or uncertain species. It is similar to the New Zealand *takahe*. What makes it intriguing is that the famous Norwegian voyager Thor Heyerdahl briefly saw a **hen-sized flightless bird** when he visited Hiva Oa (pronounced 'Hee-vuh oh-uh') in 1937. It scuttled into a burrow like a rabbit and locals said it was a kobo.



Louis Grelet,  
Marquesan model  
Tohotaua, 1902,  
photograph

Young Girl With  
Fan, 1902, 91.9 x 72.9  
cm, Museum Folkwang



*Young Girl With Fan*, 1902, 91.9 x 72.9 cm, Museum Folkwang

Louis Grelet, *Marquesan model Tohotaua*, 1902, photograph

- The sitter for this portrait was Tohotaua, the wife of a witch-doctor at Hiva Oa. The fan was a symbol of nobility in Polynesia.
- The painting was based on a photograph and we are lucky enough to have it. It was taken in his studio by a friend. We can see Tohotaua and behind her a reproduction of a painting by Hans Holbein, *The Artist's Family* c. 1528-9 showing his continued interest in portraiture. His studio also contained Japanese prints and reproductions of paintings by Manet, Puvis de Chavannes (pronounced 'poo-vis de sha-van'), Degas, Rembrandt, Raphael, Michelangelo and Holbein.
- Notice how Gauguin has changed the direct confrontational view into a dreamy gaze into space. He has removed her pareo top to expose her breast and positioned the fan over her right breast in a provocative fashion making the image overtly erotic. So he has created an archetypal Polynesian woman as passive and sexually available.

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*Land of Sensuous Pleasure Delightful Land (Te Nave Nave Fenua)*, 1892, 72.1 x 91.3 cm, Ohara Museum of Art, Okayama, Japan



*Land of Sensuous Pleasure or Delightful Land (Nave Nave Fenua)*, woodcut, 1894, G. 27 Edition of 1921, image 35.4 x 20.3 cm, National Gallery of Art

*Land of Sensuous Pleasure or Delightful Land (Nave Nave Fenua)*, woodcut, 1894, G. 27 Edition of 1921, image 35.4 x 20.3 cm, National Gallery of Art

*Eve*, woodcut, 1898-9, 27 x 20.5 cm, Cleveland Museum of Art

*Nude woman seated on a Bull*, another woman standing in front of her holding flowers; with peacock at top left, 1898-9, 24.5 x 23 cm, colour woodcut printed in olive-green on Japan paper, British Museum. Gauguin printed about 30 impressions of this block in Tahiti on thin Japan paper, most of which he numbered and signed on the reverse.

*Land of Sensuous Pleasure Delightful Land (Te Nave Nave Fenua)*, 1892, 72.1 x 91.3 cm, Ohara Museum of Art, Okayama, Japan

- Very quickly and with a single slide I will show you a selection of his woodcuts.
- Gauguin enjoyed creating with his hands and is well-known for his series of woodcuts. In *Eve*, on the left, Gauguin combines the Polynesian spirits with the Christian Eve to create a modern fable. Eve modestly covers herself invoking the expulsion from Paradise while the hooded figure represents *tupapau*, a Tahitian evil spirit, and a rat is shown as the shadow of a ghost.
- *Nude Woman Seated on a Bull* is a mythological reference to the god Jupiter who disguises himself as a white bull to seduce the princess Europa and carry her across to a distant land that would thereafter bear her name.
- On the right is one of the woodcuts he produced for the book *Noa Noa* (Tahitian for 'fragrance') in which he sought to explain his experiences to a



European audience. In this work a naked woman stands before a hut with a large lizard or spirit on the roof.

- (CLICK) He produced a painting of the same name in 1892, without the hut or the lizard but with a bright red shape coming from her head.

## **WOODCUTS**

- The woodcuts fall into five groups—the Noa Noa group of early 1894, a varied group from the summer and autumn of 1894, a small group of five from 1895-6, a cruder group produced before 1899 and finally a group of about 15 that are decorative with a single figure and a few are satirical.
- Prints were pulled by Gauguin, by the professional printer Louis Roy and posthumously by his son Pola, and others.

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*Tehura (Teha'amana)*, Head of a Tahitian Woman with a Standing Female Nude on the Reverse, 1891–3, polychromed pua wood, 25 x 20 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



*Thérèse*, c. 1902–3, painted miro wood, 66cm, private collection



*'Father Lechery' or 'Debauchery'*, Père Paillard, 1902, painted miro wood, 67.9 x 18 x 20.7 cm, Chester Dale Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

*Tehura (Teha'amana)*, sculpted head of a Tahitian woman in the form of a hollow mask with a standing female nude on the inside, 1891–3, polychromed pua wood, 25 x 20 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

*'Father Lechery' or 'Debauchery'*, Père Paillard, c. 1902–3, painted miro wood, 67.9 x 18 x 20.7 cm, Chester Dale Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

*Thérèse*, c. 1902–3, painted miro wood, 66cm, private collection

- He also produced a number of sculptures from which I have selected these.
- The sculpted head on the left is a hollow mask that contains a carving of a standing nude on the inside. It is believed to be a portrait of Tehura (Teha'amana), the thirteen year old mentioned earlier. I should point out that recent research throws doubt on the whole story of Gauguin and his young bride and suggests it is an invention created by Gauguin from a mixture of Tahitian women he knew. There is evidence of his many sexual liaisons with young women but the details are mostly taken from Gauguin's letters and his book *Noa Noa* and he was a notorious inventor of stories he presented as facts.
- The local Catholic bishop, Monseigneur Martin prohibited local women from entering Gauguin house while the bishop conducted an affair with a local woman called Thérèse despite his vows of celibacy. This hypocrisy so angered Gauguin that he carved the piece on the right with a companion piece called Thérèse and put them in front of his called which he called the House of Pleasure. He labelled the piece Père Paillard or Father Lechery or Debauchery so passers-by would appreciate the reference. The bishop is shown as a nude,

horned devil with two naked women near the base either side of him. The liaison was well known by the locals, even schoolchildren and Thérèse used to compete with her sister for access to the bishop's bed.

## **PRIMITIVISM**

- Gauguin was the **first artist to systematically develop a style of art called Primitivism** with exaggerated figures, animal totems, geometric designs and stark contrasts. Like Picasso, Gauguin was inspired by the raw power and simplicity of the so-called 'primitive art' of foreign cultures. We see two here, the one on the left is his young Tahitian lover or wife and on the right is a statuette of Bishop Martin who he lampooned as **Father Lechery** for his affairs with the local women.
- Gauguin had two posthumous exhibitions at the Salon d'Automne in Paris in 1903 and 1906 and they had a powerful influence on French avant-garde art and on Pablo Picasso in particular.
- Gauguin's initial artistic guidance was from Pissarro, but although he influenced his early work the relationship left more of a mark personally than stylistically. **Gauguin's acknowledged masters were Giotto, Raphael, Ingres, Eugène Delacroix, Manet, Degas and Cézanne.** His own beliefs, and in some cases the psychology behind his work, were also influenced by philosopher **Arthur Schopenhauer** and poet **Stéphane Mallarmé.**

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*Self portrait, 1903, Kunstmuseum Basel*



*Self portrait, 1903, Kunstmuseum Basel*

## **MARQUESAS ISLANDS (1901-03)**

- With a regular income Gauguin was able to move to the **Marquesas islands** (about 1,000 miles from Tahiti) and he spent his final months in **considerable comfort on the island of Hiva Oa**, the administrative capital of the group. Pau'ura did not come to the island with him as it was too far from her family. He could not continue sculpture as there was no clay available on the island.
- The Marquesas Islands had been ravaged by European diseases and the population shrank from 80,000 to just 4,000. **Catholic missionaries were in control** and all the children attended missionary school until their teens.
- Gauguin settled near the capital of the islands although it was small and there was a military doctor but no hospital. The **doctor left the island** and Gauguin had to rely on two health care workers and his friends. **He built a two-storey house that included a studio and held parties every night for the locals.** This upset his relationship with the bishop which took a turn for the worse when Gauguin erected a statue of the bishop with his reputed mistress and attacked the missionary school system. Many teenage daughters were withdrawn from the school and one of these was **Vaeoho** (also called Marie-Rose), the **fourteen-year-old daughter of a native couple**, who became his mistress. She gave birth to a daughter whose descendants still live on the island.
- The partying stopped and he began a **productive period and sent 20 paintings to Vollard in Paris.** Gauguin chose to **paint landscapes, still lifes,**

and **figure studies** at this time, with an eye to Vollard's clientele, **avoiding the primitive** and lost paradise themes of his Tahiti paintings.

- Always contentious, in 1903 Gauguin started a campaign against the local gendarmes for incompetence. The charges could not be substantiated and they charged him with libelling a gendarme and he was fined and sentenced to three months in prison. He appealed but was very weak and in great pain and he was taking **morphine**. He died suddenly on the morning of 8 May. He was **buried in the Catholic cemetery** ironically next to **Bishop Martin** who he had lampooned with a statuette called ***Father Lechery***. His effects were quickly auctioned leading to the loss of much valuable information about his later years.



*When Will You Marry? Tahitian: Nafea Faaipoipo*, 1892, 101 x 77 cm, private collection

*When Will You Marry? Tahitian: Nafea Faaipoipo*, 1892, 101 x 77 cm, private collection

February 2015: acquired by Al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani for Qatar.

### Death and his Legacy (8 May 1903)

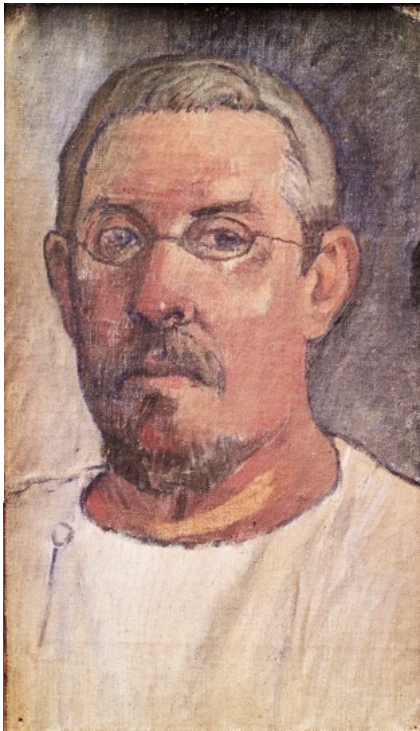
- Gauguin's fame began to grow shortly after his death and many of his works were bought by a Russian collector and they are now in the Pushkin Museum and the Hermitage.
- I am showing this work again as in 2015 it became the world's third-most expensive artwork when its owner (the family of Rudolf Staechelin) sold it for **US\$210 million to the State of Qatar**. That currently makes it the fourth highest price ever paid for a work of art after Leonardo's *Salvator Mundi*, de Kooning's *Interchange* and Cézanne's *The Card Players*.

### NOTES

- In 2014 the painting *Fruits on a Table* (1889), with an estimated value of between €10m and €30m (£8.3m to £24.8m), which had been stolen in London in 1970, was discovered in Italy. It had been bought, together with a work by Pierre Bonnard, by a Fiat employee in 1975, at a railway lost property sale, for 45,000 lira (about £32). One small painting of Pau'ura was sold for 150 francs to a naval officer and it was sold at Sotheby's in 2004 for \$39 million.
- In 1902 Gauguin's health began to deteriorate, his unhealed ankle became



more and more painful until he had to take morphine. His sight was beginning to fail as well and he considered returning to Europe for treatment but a friend advised him to stay for the sake of his art and to keep his enemies silent. *Noa Noa* was finally published and he wrote some other essays. The written attacks on the governor, the bishop and the gendarmerie continued but by December 1902 his health was so poor he could hardly paint. He began an autobiographical memoir (*Before and After*) which he completed in two months. At the beginning of 1903 he began another attack on the gendarmerie but the allegations could not be substantiated and he was fined 500 francs and three months in prison for libel. He was in such great pain he resorted to morphine again and died suddenly on the morning of 8 May 1903 probably of a heart attack.



## PAUL GAUGUIN (1848-1903)

### QUESTIONS

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- Gauguin was the first artist to be inspired by the culture of the art of foreign cultures, then known as 'primitive' art, a term of admiration and respect. He influenced later artists, such as Pablo Picasso, who was also inspired by the raw power and simplicity of so called 'primitive' art. There is no evidence he ever raped anyone or that he had syphilis. Young girls that has passed puberty, often 13 or 14, were expected to marry and it was common practice for colonials to take native wives. A lot of his sexual exploits were just boasting. A lot of what he did is unacceptable today, but it was normal then.
- Gauguin's bold, colourful designs influenced many other artists who became the founders of modern art, such as van Gogh, Henri Matisse, Georges Braque and art movements such as Fauvism and Cubism.
- The last word is from Gauguin himself who wrote just before he died, "**I have wished to establish the right to dare, the public owes me nothing, since my achievement in painting is only relatively good, but the painters - who today profit by this liberty - they owe something to me.**" That is, above all, he dared to be different.

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