

Paul Gauguin

(go-GAN) French painter

1848 – 1903

Movement: Post-Impressionism, Primitivism

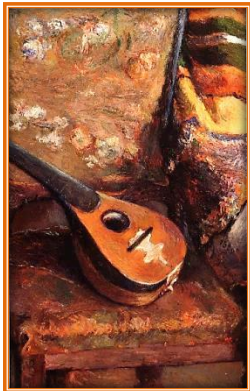
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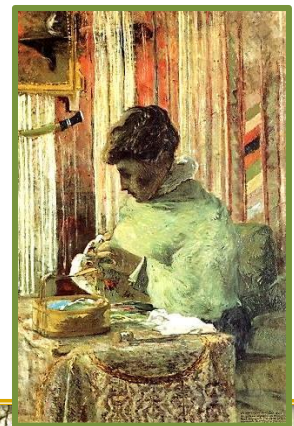
Eugène Henri Paul Gauguin was a French Post-Impressionist artist who was not well appreciated until after his death. Gauguin became important as a painter, sculptor, print-maker, ceramist, and writer. His experimentation with coloring led directly to the Synthetist style of modern art. He was a influential proponent of wood engraving and woodcuts as art forms.

Gauguin was born in Paris, France, to journalist Clovis Gauguin and Alina Maria Chazal, daughter of the socialist leader Flora Tristan, a feminist who was part of an influential Peruvian family. In 1850 the family left Paris for Peru. Clovis died on the voyage. Alina, Paul's sister and **18-month-old** Paul, went to live in Lima with Alina's brother and his family for four years.

At the age of **seven**, Paul's family returned to France to live with his grandfather. The Gauguins were market gardeners and greengrocers: *gauguin* means "walnut-grower". Clovis had broken with family tradition to become a journalist. Paul learned French, though Peruvian Spanish remained his preferred language, and he excelled in his studies. After attending local schools, he was sent to a Catholic boarding school for three years, which he hated. At **17**, Gauguin signed on as a pilot's assistant in the merchant marine to fulfill his required military service. Three years later, he joined the French navy, serving for two years. He was in the Caribbean when he found out that his mother had died. In 1871 (**23**), Gauguin returned to Paris where his mother's rich boyfriend, got him a job as a stockbroker. He was a successful Parisian businessman for the next 11 years.



In 1873 (**25**), Gauguin began painting. His home was near cafés frequented by the Impressionists. He befriended **Pissarro**, visiting him on Sundays, to paint in his garden. Gauguin painted with Pissarro and occasionally **Cézanne** over two summer holidays. His was the only sculpture (of his son **Émile**) entered in the 4th Impressionist Exhibition of 1879 (**31**) and he had paintings in the 1881 and 1882 exhibitions.



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In 1873 (**25**), he married Danish Mette-Sophie Gad. In ten years, they had five children: **Émile**, Aline, Clovis, Jean René, and Paul Rollon. Gauguin moved his family to Copenhagen, Denmark, where he pursued a career as a tarpaulin salesman. It was not a success. He did not speak Danish, and the Danes did not want French tarpaulins. Mette became the chief breadwinner, giving French lessons to diplomats.



Main source of document: Wikipedia. ***N**

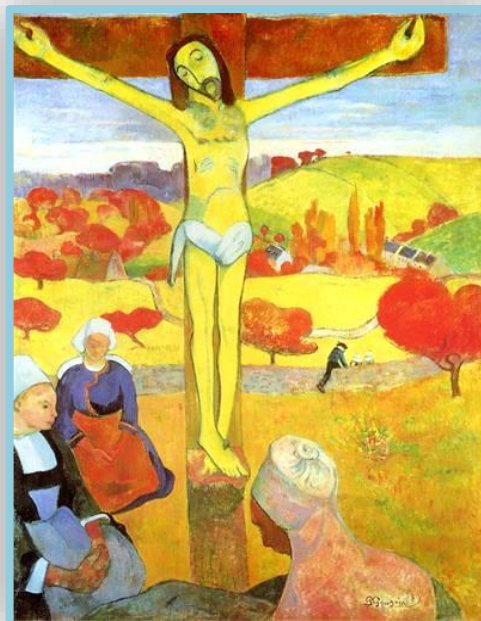
The embroiderer or Mette Gauguin, c. 1878 (**40**).

Mandolin on a Chair, 1880 (**32**). Detail section of

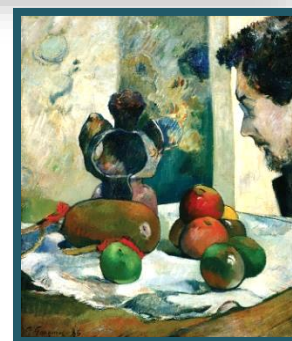
Mette asleep on a sofa, 1875 (**27**). *Garden in Vaugirard (Painter's Family in the Garden in Rue Carcel)*, 1881 (**33**).

His marriage fell apart after 11 years when Gauguin chose to paint full-time. He returned to Paris in 1885 (37), after his wife and her family asked him to leave because he had renounced the values they shared. Paul Gauguin's last physical contact with them was in 1891 (43). Gauguin experienced many bouts of depression and at one time attempted suicide.

Disappointed with Impressionism, Gauguin felt that European painting had become too imitative, whereas African and Asian art seemed to him full of symbolism and vigour. The art of other cultures was vogue in Europe at the time, especially Japan's. His work evolved towards **Cloisonnism**, a style of painting with flat areas of color and bold outlines reminiscent Medieval cloisonné enameling. In *The Yellow Christ*, a quintessential Cloisonnist work, the image was reduced to areas of pure color separated by heavy black outlines. His painting later evolved towards **Synthetism** in which neither form nor color predominate but each has an equal role.

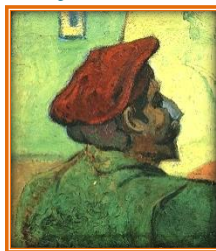


In 1887 (39), he arrived in Martinique by way of Panama where he'd been without a job and broke. France had a policy of repatriation where if a citizen

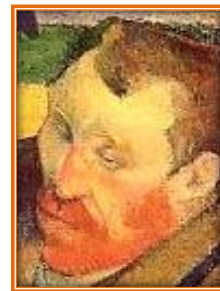


became stranded on a French colony, the state would pay for the boat ride back.

Upon leaving Panama protected by the repatriation policy, Gauguin and his his artist friend, Charles **Laval**, decided to get off the boat in Martinique. It's not known if Gauguin intentionally or spontaneously decided to stay. At first, the 'negro hut' in which they lived suited him. However, the weather in the summer was hot and the hut leaked in the rain. Gauguin also suffered dysentery and marsh fever. He painted and traveled widely. Gauguin stated, *"I had a decisive experience in Martinique. It was only there that I felt like my real self, and one must look for me in the works I brought back from there, rather than those from Brittany, if one wants to know who I am."*



In 1888 (40), Gauguin and **Van Gogh** spent nine weeks painting together, at the latter's *Yellow House* in Arles. Their



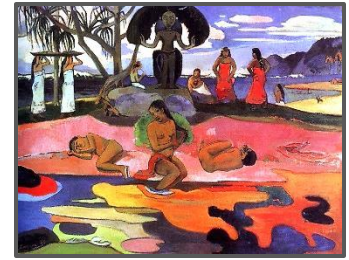
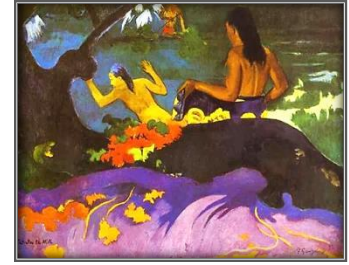
relationship deteriorated, and Gauguin decided to leave. According to Gauguin, Van Gogh confronted him with a razor blade. Later that evening van Gogh cut off the lower part of his own left ear lobe. Van Gogh was hospitalized and Gauguin immediately left Arles. They never saw each other again, but they corresponded and in 1890 (42) Gauguin proposed they form an artist studio in Antwerp. Van Gogh died in 1890.



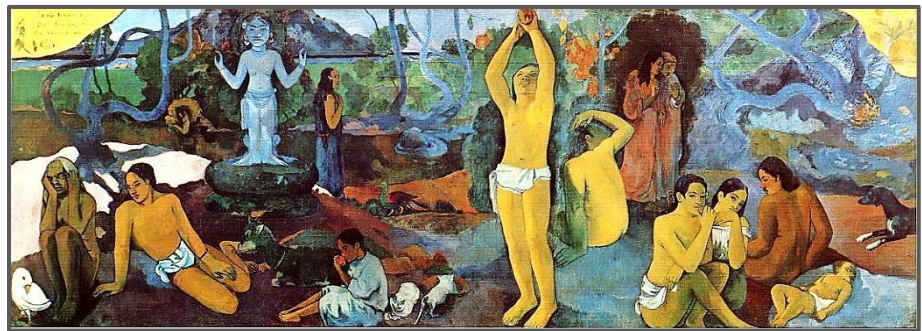
The Yellow Christ (Le Christ jaune), 1889 (41). *Still Life with Profile of Laval*, 1886 (38). *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers (2)*, 1888 (40) (Including inset detail of Van Gogh's face). **Van Gogh:** *Paul Gauguin (Man in a Red Beret)*, 1888. *The Yellow House*, 1888.

In 1891 (43), Gauguin sailed to French Polynesia to escape European civilization and "everything that is artificial and conventional". He wrote *Noa Noa*, a book describing his experiences in Tahiti.

Living in Tahiti, he painted *Fatata te Miti* ("By the Sea"), *La Orana Maria* ("Ave Maria"), and other depictions of Tahitian life. In 1893 (45) Gauguin returned to France, where he painted *Mahana No Atua* ("Day of the God") which depicted Tahitian religion. Scenes of Polynesian life form the background for the three women at the edge of a pool. The woman whose toes touch the water on the left side of the pool represents birth; the figure in the middle, who is sitting upright with both feet in the water, represents life; while the figure on the right represents death by turning away from the pool. He moved to Tahiti in 1897 (49), where he created *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, and then lived the rest of his life in the Marquesas Islands, returning to France only once.



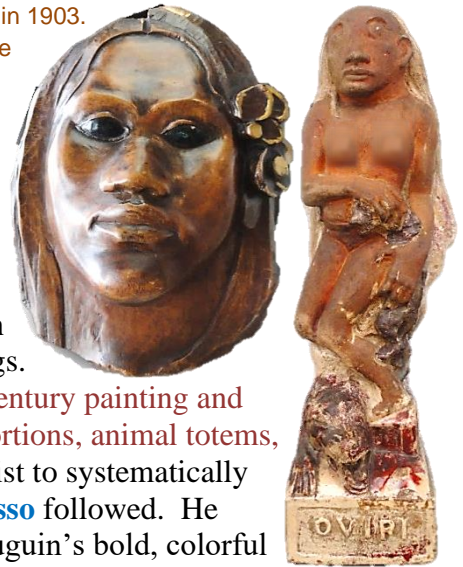
This is Paul Gauguin's most famous painting, and he considered it his masterpiece, and the culmination of his thoughts. In Tahiti, as he was painting it, Gauguin declared that he would commit suicide upon its completion. Although this was something he had previously attempted, this was not the case as he died of syphilis in 1903.



The painting was meant to be read from right to left, with the three main figures in the painting representing the three questions of the title. The figures are arranged from the beginning stages of life, from young figures with a child, to the middle aged figure in the middle, to the elder figure on the left of the painting. The idol in the background, situated behind the elder figure, represents the "Beyond." - Wikiart



His works became full of quasi-religious symbolism and the inhabitants of Polynesia. He wrote the book *Avant et après* (before and after), a fragmented collection of observations about life in Polynesia, and comments on literature and paintings.



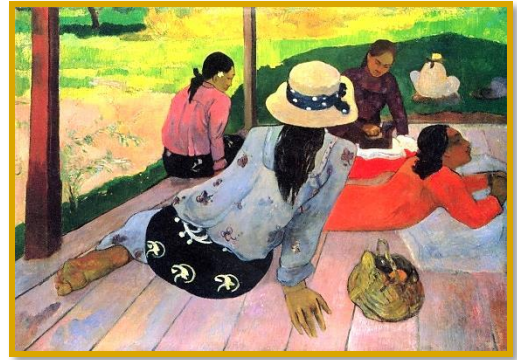
Primitivism was an art movement of late 19th-century painting and sculpture characterized by exaggerated body proportions, animal totems, geometric designs and stark contrasts. The first artist to systematically use these effects and achieve public success was Paul Gauguin. **Picasso** followed. He was very interested in Gauguin's work in the years 1905 – 1907. Gauguin's bold, colorful and design oriented paintings inspired such artists and movements as Vincent **van Gogh**, Henri **Matisse**, Pablo **Picasso**, Georges **Braque**, André **Derain**, Fauvism, Cubism and Orphism.

La Orana Maria ("Ave Maria"), 1891 (43). *Fatata te Miti* ("By the Sea"), 1892 (44). *Mahana No Atua* (Day of the God), 1894 (46). *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* 1897 (49).

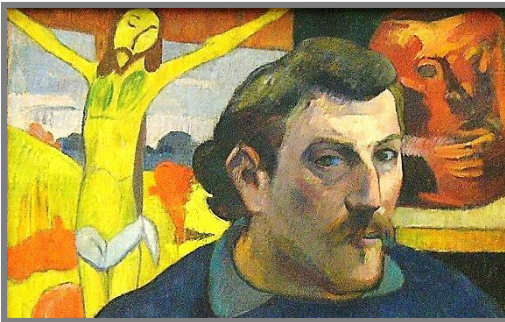
Tehura (Teha'amana). Polychromed pua wood. Realized during Gauguin's first voyage to Tahiti c.1891-1893 (43-46).

Oviri (Savage), 1894 (46). Partially glazed stoneware. The theme of *Oviri* is death, savagery, wildness. *Oviri* stands over a dead she-wolf, while crushing the life out of her cub. Gauguin wrote, it is a matter of "life in death".

Photo: Gauguin, c. 1895, playing a harmonium at Alphonse Mucha's studio in Paris (Mucha photo)

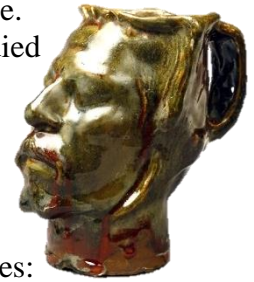


Toward the end of his life, sick and suffering from an unhealed injury, he got into legal trouble for taking the natives' side against French colonialists. In 1903 (54), he was charged with libeling the governor, and given three days to prepare his defense. He was fined 500 francs and sentenced to three months in prison. He appealed for a new trial. At the second trial, Gauguin was fined 500 francs and sentenced to one month in prison. He was being supported by the art dealer Ambroise Vollard then. He died (Overdose of morphine? Heart attack? Syphilis?) before he could start the prison sentence. His body had been weakened by alcohol.

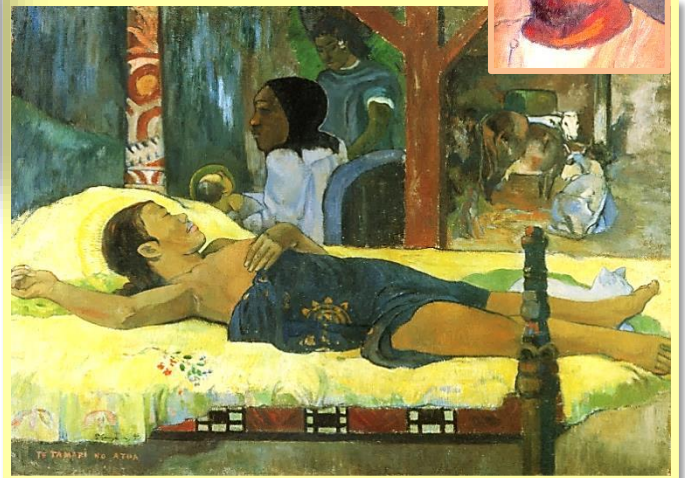
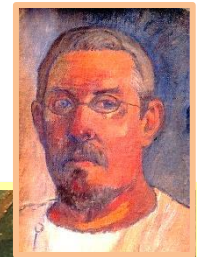
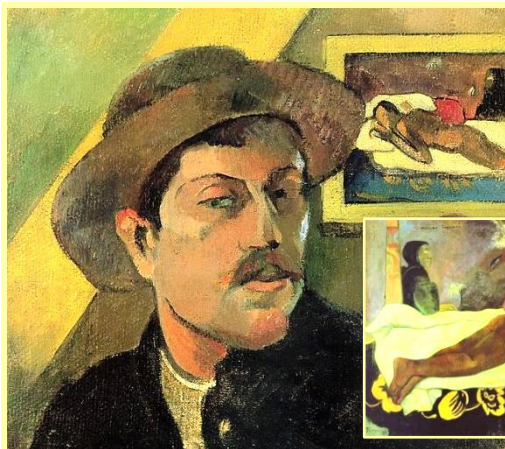


The vogue for Gauguin's work started soon after his death. Gauguin paintings are rarely offered for sale.

Legacy: His children: Aline and Clovis died before Gauguin. Émile was a construction engineer in the U.S. Jean René became a well-known sculptor and a socialist. Pola (Paul Rollon) became an artist, an art critic and wrote *My Father, Paul Gauguin*.



Gauguin had several children by mistresses: Germaine (pg:43) by Juliette Huais; a daughter, by his Tahitian mistress, Pau'ura, (Her birth was portrayed in his 1896 (48) *Te tamari no atua*. She died days later); Émile Marae a Tai (pg:51) (Illiterate and raised in Tahiti, was brought to Chicago by a journalist in 1963 and became an artist) with Pau'ura; and a daughter (pg:53) with Mari-Rose.



Woman with a Flower, 1891 (43).

Tahitian Women on the Beach, 1891.

The Midday Nap, 1894 (46).

1889 (41): *Christ in the Garden of Olives* (self-portrait), *Self-portrait, Jug in the form of a Head - Self-portrait*.

Self-portrait, 1893 (45).

Spirit of the Dead Watching 1892 (44).

Self-portrait, 1902 (54). *Te tamari no atua*, 1896 (48).