

## Van Gogh and Gauguin, the Early Years



Self Portraits, Gauguin 1875-77; van Gogh 1886

Van Gogh and Gauguin had much in common: they both came late to art and were largely self taught. They both discovered, and were friends with, the older generation of Impressionists, in particular Pissarro. They were influenced by them to lighten their palettes and introduce brighter colour into their work. They both forged completely individual styles that are highly personal and immediately recognisable; and both, for different reasons, had to struggle against opposition from some of their family members to their chosen careers. They became friends, and had a high regard for each others work, but each with such strong and unbending temperaments that it led to inevitable breakdown in their relations at one point. Van Gogh in particular had a volatile and emotional nature that put strains on his friends and family relations.

Both had an incalculable influence on the future development of European art; and, along with Cézanne, may be regarded as the fathers of modern Art.

If it can be said that the Impressionists broke the mould into which European art had been poured for seven hundred years, then the Post Impressionists: van Gogh, Gauguin and Cézanne put together from the pieces a completely new way of representing the phenomenal world.

### Van Gogh 1853 until March 1886

***“A great fire burns within me, but no one stops to warm themselves at it, and passers-by only see a wisp of smoke”***

Vincent van Gogh born on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1853 was the eldest of six children to the Reverend Theodorus van Gogh and his wife Anna. However, he wasn't the first child. Exactly a year earlier to the day Anna gave birth to a still born child, who they had also named Vincent after his grandfather. The ghost of this unborn doppelgänger was to haunt him, through his mother's criticism and sense of disappointment in her eldest son.

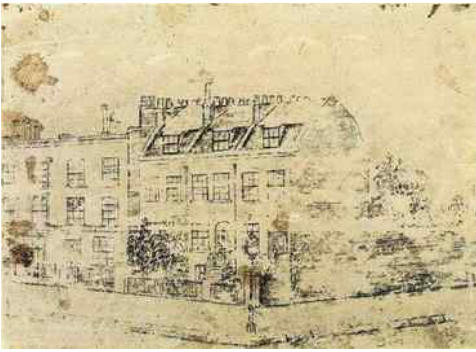
The young Vincent van Gogh (1853-90) was studious, serious and thoughtful, but was unhappy, when sent away to various schools and suffered from bouts of depression. Mental illness was also inherited from earlier members of the family. His parents, who were very stern, christians, his mother in particular, found it difficult to cope with and understand their troubled son. Only Theo, their next son, who encouraged him and supported him financially in his art, had a real faith in his place in art, although their relationship came under strain at various times. Apart from Theo, Vincent got on well only with his sister Wil (Wilhelmein). There were two other sisters, Anna and Elizabeth, and another brother, Cornelius, the youngest.



Van Gogh, aged nineteen, photograph

Anna lived with Vincent in London for a period in 1874-5. Their initially warm relationship became strained; in April 1875, Anna wrote about Vincent's behaviour to Theo: "I believe that he has illusions about people and judges people before he knows them, and then when he finds out what they're really like and they don't live up to the opinion he formed of them prematurely, he's so disappointed that he throws them away like a bouquet of wilted flowers, without looking to see whether or not there are some among those wilted flowers which, when handled with care, are not quite rubbish yet."

Through his uncle Vincent (Cent), who worked for the Paris art dealers Goupil and Cie, he started work in 1869 in the Hague branch of the firm, and three years later, aged twenty transferred to the London branch where he made his earliest known sketch (discovered in 1973) of 87 Hackford Road, Stockwell where he took lodgings.



This was a happy time for Van Gogh; he was successful at work and, at 20, was earning more than his father. Theo's wife later remarked that this was the best year of Vincent's life. However, he became infatuated with his landlady's daughter, Eugénie Loyer; but she was secretly engaged to a former lodger and Vincent was rejected after confessing his feelings. He grew more isolated, increasingly depressed, and religiously fervent. In 1875 he was transferred to Paris, but was out of sympathy with the company and its commodifying of art and was dismissed in March 1876 for advising clients not to buy "such rubbish." Theo also had begun his apprenticeship with Goupil in 1873.

In April 1876 he returned to England to take unpaid work as a supply teacher in a small boarding school in Ramsgate. The arrangement did not work out and he left to become a Methodist minister's assistant, then returned to Amsterdam to study as a priest. He failed the entrance exam for the university, and also failed a three month course at a protestant missionary course.

In 1879 he took up a post as missionary in the mining district of Borinage, in Belgium, but outraged the church authorities when, to show support for the impoverished parishioners, he gave up his comfortable lodging to live in a small hut and sleep on straw. During his time in the Borinage he wrote to Theo that he was considering what purpose he could give to his life; inspired by the lives of the local people he started to produce drawings of the local miners, which powerfully express his concerns and identification with their burdensome lives. From 1880, he started painting in earnest.



**Miners: Women Carrying Sacks;  
The Bearers of the Burden**  
Drawn in Brussels, 1881



Theo encouraged him to take up art seriously and in October 1880 on his advice he went to Brussels to study with the Dutch artist Willem Roelofs who persuaded him – in spite of his dislike of formal schools of art – to attend the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts. He registered at the Académie in November 1880, where he studied anatomy and the standard rules of modelling and perspective. There he met Anthon van Rappard, who was to become a friend and an influence on his art.

This watercolour study of a **Woman Sewing** (1881), in a traditional Dutch genre style, demonstrates Vincent's considerable expertise early in his career as an artist in the understanding of anatomy, the rendering of light, and flesh tones, the texture of materials and a mastery of the difficult medium of watercolour. It perhaps reflects not



only his formal and dedicated study of his trade, but also his long experience and knowledge of art through his early experience working in the Goupil firm of art dealers.

In April 1881 he returned to Etten for an extended stay with his parents. He continued to draw, often using his neighbours as subjects. That summer, his recently widowed cousin, Cornelia "Kee" Vos-Stricker, came to stay. They took long walks together, when he developed an infatuation for her and surprised everyone by declaring his love to her and proposing marriage. Kee was seven years older than he was and had an eight-year-old son. Her rejection of him caused him to behave irrationally, and further family breakdown.



**Rooftops, View from the Atelier, The Hague 1882**

In a letter of 1881 he wrote to Theo *"I find Father and Mother's sermons and ideas about God, people, morality and virtue a lot of stuff and nonsense."* However, in 1889 he said *"Whatever I think on other points, our father and mother were exemplary as married people."*

Later in the year Anton Mauve (1838-88), a very successful artist, a leading member of the Hague School, and a cousin by marriage, suggested that Vincent move to the Hague. He spent three weeks at Mauve's studio at the end of 1881 and during that time, under Mauve's tutelage, he made his first experiments in painting in oils and watercolour. He was revered by van Gogh

and a major influence on him. However, although Mauve is mentioned, directly or indirectly, in 152 of van Gogh's surviving letters his difficult nature and disagreements over Mauve's academic teaching methods, such as drawing from plaster casts, caused for a strained relationship.

There is something melancholy in this watercolour of a **Pollard Willow** (1882) under a dull and cloudy sky. The pollarded tree has the look of a victim, crying out for help.



Early in 1882 Vincent took up with a prostitute and set up a domestic relationship with her. Clasina Maria Hoornik known as Sien, who he found walking the streets of the Hague was destitute, addicted to alcohol and tobacco, had a five year old daughter and was pregnant. This caused further breakdown in his relationships with his family, and was possibly the cause of his falling out with Mauve. He seems to have been very fond of her, and it has been said that this was possibly the only truly loving relationship that he had with a woman. He cared for her during the birth of her son, and she and her children were the subjects of a number of drawings, paintings and the lithographic print **Sorrow** (1882).



He appears to have thought highly of the lithograph, considering it an important work and describing the drawing as "the best figure I've drawn". In a letter from July 1882, he states; "I want to make drawings that touch some people. Sorrow is a small beginning [...] there is at least something directly from my own heart."

Although the overall feel of the image has been described as bleak, the presence of spring flowers hints at the possibility of redemption. Vincent depicts Sien Hoornik as a woman scarred by life, seeing parallels to his own drawings of age-old trees ravaged by nature, such as **The Roots in Sandy Ground (Les racines)** (1882). He commented "I wanted to express something of life's struggle, both in that white slender female figure and in those gnarled black roots with their knots."



Van Gogh always identified with the downtrodden, the poor and the exploited, feeling himself to be a kindred spirit. In November 1882 he began drawings of individuals to depict a range of character types from the working class, **Worn Out** was one of the series. He would offer a small payment for residents of the almshouse to pose for him.

Theo encouraged Vincent to start painting in oils, rather than the black and white drawings. He made his first oil paintings in December 1881, under the supervision of Anton Mauve.



The **Beach at Scheveningen in Stormy Weather** is his second attempt at painting in oils in August 1882.

On a blustery day, Van Gogh set up his easel and painted at the beach resort of Scheveningen, near The Hague. He struggled with the strong wind whipping up sand and nearly blowing him off his feet, sending grains of sand into his thickly applied paint. The tumultuous weather is well depicted with white-capped seas, threatening sky and wind-blown flags.

The composition is broken into three horizontal zones: a threatening grey sky with dark roiling clouds, the greenish-grey sea with lines of white-capped waves crashing onto the shore, and the beach and sand dunes in browns, oranges, yellows and greens. A number of people are on the beach, some fishwives in their white bonnets, watching as a group of men with horses and a cart are about to pull on a rope attached to a waiting fishing boat to bring it safely ashore. The people are suggested by a few economical brushstrokes, and the breakers by thick lines of paint applied directly from the tube.

The painting is an Impressionist take on the grey-tinged seascapes of the Hague School, such as Hendrik Mesdag's *Preparations for Departure* (1876).



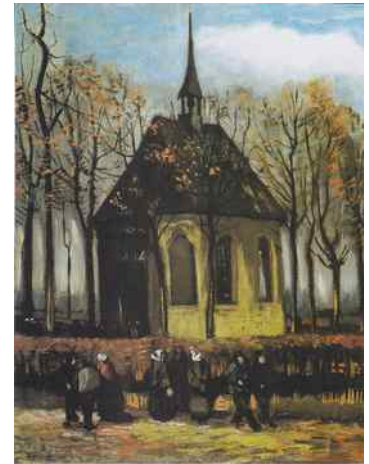
In August 1882 he made two studies of *Girl in White in the Woods*.

He remarked at how much he enjoyed the work and explains how he wishes to trigger the audience's senses and how they may experience the painting: "The ... study in the wood is of some large green beech

*trunks on a stretch of ground covered with dry sticks, and the little figure of a girl in white. There was the great difficulty of keeping it clear, and of getting space between the trunks standing at different distances - and the place and relative bulk of those trunks change with the perspective - to make it so that one can breathe and walk around in it, and to make you smell the fragrance of the wood."*



At this time he was supporting Sien and her children, and it seems that there might have been an element of exploitation on her part, influenced by her rapacious mother. After the birth of her son Willem in 1882, Sien and van Gogh moved into an apartment with a studio. This was reportedly a happy period for van Gogh but by early 1883 she had started drinking again and returned to prostitution. The shared apartment became squalid, and the relationship between them deteriorated. Vincent found it increasingly difficult to support Hoornik and her children, out of his meagre allowance from Theo. Finally he succumbed to pressure from his father and left her in September the following year, and moved to Drenthe, and then to Nuenen, where his parents were now living. In 1904, Sien drowned herself in the Schelde River.



In Nuenen, Van Gogh focused on painting and drawing. Working outside and very quickly, he completed sketches and paintings of weavers and their cottages and of the church and local scenes, such as the *Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen*, (1884-85). The church, where his father preached is just across the garden from the house and the subject of a number of his oil studies. Working outside and very quickly, he completed sketches and paintings of weavers and their cottages. The pen and ink drawing of the *Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in Winter* (1884) is one of many studies he made, of the garden.

Van Gogh continuously experimented with his drawing style. The spiky trees in this masterful drawing have a lively animalistic feel. The pathway and the flower beds lead to the horizon line and the tower like structure of the church.

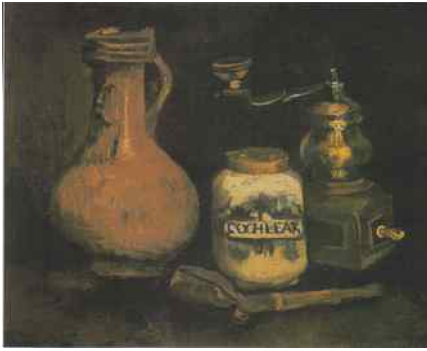
In Nuenen he had another failed love affair. Margot Begemann, a neighbour's daughter ten years his senior, joined him on his forays; she fell in love and although he reciprocated, it was with less enthusiasm. They wanted to marry, but neither side of their families were in favour. Margot was distraught and took an overdose of strychnine, but survived after Van Gogh rushed her to a nearby hospital.

In March 1884 Theo began dealing in the work of the Impressionists, beginning with a painting by Pissarro.

During his two-year stay in Nuenen, Vincent completed numerous drawings and watercolours and nearly 200 oil paintings when he experimented with the use of light falling across objects.

In November 1884 he started teaching some friends to paint inanimate objects in oil. In his enthusiasm he created a series of still life paintings of bottles, bowls and pots and other objects. The paintings of this period, such a *Still Life with Straw Hat* (September 1885) are characterized by smooth, meticulous brushwork and fine shading of colours, and are highly regarded by critics and writers for their technical mastery.





However, his palette consisted mainly of sombre earth tones, as in **Still Life with Coffee Mill and Pipe Case** (1884) particularly dark brown, and he showed no sign of developing the vivid coloration that distinguishes his later, best known work. When he complained that Theo was not making enough effort to sell his paintings in Paris, Theo replied that they were too dark and not in line with the current style of bright Impressionist paintings. As he had at this time not seen the work of the Impressionists the advice went unheeded.

Theo had asked him often to lighten up his work, referring to the work of the Impressionists. In a letter to Theo written mid-June 1884, Vincent remarks:

*“When I hear you talk about a lot of new names, it’s not always possible for me to understand when I’ve seen absolutely nothing by them. And from what you said about ‘Impressionism’, I’ve grasped that it’s something different from what I thought it was, but it’s still not entirely clear to me what one should understand by it. But for my part, I find so tremendously much in Israëls, for instance, that I’m not particularly curious about or eager for something different or newer.”*

Van Gogh found the subjects of peasants and other working class people noble and important in the development of modern art, and make up a large body of Van Gogh's work during this period; the character studies were an important, foundational component in his artistic development. He had seen the changing landscape in the Netherlands as industrialization encroached on once pastoral settings and the livelihoods of the working poor with little opportunity to change vocation.

Three artists who influenced van Gogh in his sympathy for peasants and others of lowly status and compelled him to adopt them as subject matter for his paintings were Millet, Israëls and van Rappard.

**Jean-François Millet (1814-75)** was one of the founders of the Barbican school and part of the Realist art movement in rural France. He was the poet of placid rural life and is noted for his paintings of peasant farmers.

Van Gogh, throughout his life, made variations on Millet's paintings. The drawing of **The Sower** is after a painting by Millet and formed the subject of a number of his paintings and drawings.



Millet, **Going to Work**, 1851-53



**Jozef Israëls (1824 – 1911)** was an artist highly revered by van Gough. As a leading member of the group of the Hague School of landscape painters he was, during his lifetime, "the most respected Dutch artist of the second half of the nineteenth century".

Along with Jean-François Millet he saw in the life of the poor and humble a motive for expressing with peculiar intensity deep human sympathy for the downtrodden and depressed. Whereas in Millet's work, individual men and women became heroic and real, in almost all Israëls' pictures there is some piercing note of woe, as in **Alone in the World** (1881). It has been said of them "that they were painted with gloom and suffering."

**Anthon van Rappard (1858-92)** was a friend and mentor of Vincent's. They corresponded often. He did a number of paintings of weavers in dark interior workshops, which inspired van Gogh to adopt the subject. There are very few extant pictures of van Rappard, due to his very short life.

He depicts in **Labourers at the Ruimzicht Brickyard** (1885) the changes brought to the countryside and farming methods by the introduction of machinery. Vincent in a letter to van Rappard offered some advice on changes to the composition. In particular he suggested that the central figure of a woman with a shovel should be changed to a man carrying bricks, as more characteristic of the occupation.





The "peasant genre" of the Realist movement began in the 1840s with the works of Jean-François Millet, Jules Breton, and others. Van Gogh described the works of Millet and Breton as having religious significance, "*something on high,*" and described them as being the "*voices of the wheat.*"

**Peasant Woman Digging, or Woman with a Spade, Seen from Behind** (1885) is one of the character studies of working men and women such as farmers, weavers, and fishermen which made up a large body of van Gogh's work during this period. He dreamed his studio would one day become a form of respite for the poor where they could receive food, shelter and money in return for posing.

On 26 March 1885, his father died of a heart attack.



**Skull of a Skeleton with Burning Cigarette** was most likely painted in the winter of 1885–86 as a satirical comment on conservative academic practices.



The studies of peasants, culminated in 1885 in his first major painting, **The Potato Eaters**. At the time he used somber colours often mixed with black, which he felt was like that of 17th-century masters, such as Frans Hals. One half of the cottage in this study is where the family in *The Potato Eaters* lived.

He regarded his labour at his art in the same light as the dedicated and honourable labour of the farm worker, "*One must undertake with confidence, with a certain assurance that one is doing a reasonable thing, like the farmer who drives the plough... (one who) drags the harrow behind himself. If one hasn't a horse, one is one's own horse.*"

Van Gogh said that he wanted to depict peasants as they really were. He deliberately chose coarse and ugly models, thinking that they would be natural and unspoiled in his finished work.

Writing to his sister Willemina two years later in Paris, van Gogh still considered *The Potato Eaters* his most successful painting: "*What I think about my own work is that the painting of the peasants eating potatoes that I did in Nuenen is after all the best thing I did*".

However, the work was criticized by Anthon van Rappard, soon after it was painted. This was a blow to van Gogh's confidence as an emerging artist, and he wrote back to his friend, "*you...had no right to condemn my work in the way you did*" (July 1885), and later, "*I am always doing what I can't do yet in order to learn how to do it.*" (August 1885).



He moved to Antwerp that November and rented a room above a paint dealer's shop. He lived in poverty and ate poorly, preferring to spend the money Theo sent on painting materials and models. Bread, coffee and tobacco became his staple diet. In February 1886, he wrote to Theo that he could only remember eating six hot meals since the previous May. His teeth became loose and painful. In Antwerp he applied himself to the study of colour theory and spent time in museums—particularly studying the work of Rubens—and broadened his palette to include carmine, cobalt blue and emerald green. He bought Japanese ukiyo-e woodcuts in the docklands, later incorporating elements of their style into the background of some of his paintings. He was drinking heavily again, and was hospitalised between February and March 1886, when he was possibly also treated for syphilis.

## Gauguin 1848 until Summer 1886

*“There is always a heavy demand for fresh mediocrity. In every generation the least cultivated taste has the largest appetite.”*

**Paul Gauguin** (1848-1903) was largely unappreciated until after his death, but is now recognized for his experimental use of colour and the Synthetist style that were distinct from Impressionism.

His father, a 34-year-old liberal journalist, was compelled to flee France in 1850 when the newspaper for which he wrote was suppressed by the French authorities. He died on the boat to Peru, where they were to stay with his wife's South American relations. Paul was 18 months old, and his sister was two and a half. Gauguin's mother, Aline was welcomed by her paternal granduncle, whose son-in-law would shortly assume the presidency of Peru. Paul's maternal grandmother, Flora Tristan, was the illegitimate daughter of Thérèse Laisnay and Don Mariano de Tristan Moscoso, who came from an aristocratic Spanish family from the Peruvian city of Arequipa. Which heritage caused Gauguin to declare: *“I come from the Princes of Aragon, but I am also a savage.”*



Gauguin with Mette, 1885; photo 1891; Self Portrait 1885

To the age of six, Paul enjoyed a privileged upbringing, attended by nursemaids and servants. He retained a vivid memory of that period of his childhood which instilled "indelible impressions of Peru that haunted him [for] the rest of his life" In 1854 his family mentors fell from political power during Peruvian civil conflicts and Gauguin's idyllic childhood ended abruptly. Aline returned to France with her children, leaving Paul with his paternal grandfather, Guillaume Gauguin, in Orléans.



After leaving school he became a pilot's assistant on a boat and later joined the merchant navy. His mother died in 1867, aged 42, while he was at sea, but he didn't hear of it until a letter from his sister caught up with him in India.

In 1871, aged 23, Gauguin returned to Paris where he secured a job as a stockbroker at the Paris Bourse, and two years later started painting in his spare time.

In 1873, he married Mette-Sophie Gad (1850–1920), a Danish woman. Over the next ten years, they had five children. Mette is the model for his painting ***The Embroiderer*** (1880), which is still traditional in its design, proportions and spacial arrangement, but is executed with freely applied impressionistic brushstrokes and his emerging interest in colour as a structural element in the composition.

*“It is so small a thing, the life of a man, and yet there is time to do great things, fragments of a common task.”*

Gauguin visited galleries frequently and during this time purchased work by emerging artists. He visited the nearby cafés frequented by the Impressionists and formed a friendship with Camille Pissarro who introduced him to other artists and on Sundays he would go to paint in Pissarro's garden. He exhibited in three of the Impressionist Exhibitions, and although his paintings received dismissive reviews, several of them, such as ***The Market Gardens of Vaugirard*** (1879), are now highly regarded.



He became a successful Parisian businessman and remained one for the next 11 years. In 1879 he was earning 30,000 francs a year (about \$145,000 in 2019 US dollars) as a stockbroker, and as much again in his dealings in the art market.

The ***Winter Landscape*** (1879) shows the influence of Pissarro and the Impressionists, in the choice of subject, the technique of painting in small dabs and dashes, the pastel colours producing atmosphere and distance, and the use of blues in the shadows.

In his **Still-life with Wood Tankard and Metal Pitcher** (1880) Gauguin contrasts the materials of two humble objects. It has been suggested that he is referencing "the fable of the *Pot de terre et le pot de fer*. Although the jug was in fact a wooden Norwegian tankard, and the smaller jug was made of pewter, the opposition Gauguin sets up between these two domestic receptacles seem to evoke the *La Fontaine* fable." The composition and colour arrangement is simple but striking: setting the opposition of the near complementaries of reddish brown and blueish green in a 'symphony' of silver greys and whites, reminiscent of James Whistler.



The **Study of a Nude (Suzanne sewing)** (1880) is set in a bedroom with the woman sitting on an unmade bed against a mauve wall that is decorated with a mandolin and a tapestry. The body of the model is a three-quarter perspective with the head in profile. While the woman's face suggests she is attractive, her body is flabby, disproportionately pear-shaped and intentionally ugly. The painting shows the influence of the Impressionist painters on Gauguin. The heavy flesh of this big-boned pregnant woman, together with her everyday task, share the realistic eye of Degas, while the still-life quality of the setting and the overall conception of the picture suggest Manet's approach. The fine brushwork of the nuanced colouring of light, and the blue and green shadows on the woman's skin, recall Renoir and even more Pissarro.

It was exhibited in the 1881 Impressionist exhibition, but despite its impact and a favourable review Gauguin was unable to sell it. His wife, Mette, refused to hang the painting in their home. However, when Gauguin left his family in Copenhagen the picture was held by her until it was sold in 1892 to the Danish artist, Theodor Philipson.

His close friend Émile Schuffenecker, a former stockbroker who also aspired to become an artist, lived nearby. Gauguin showed paintings in Impressionist exhibitions held in 1881 and 1882 (earlier, a sculpture of his son Émile had been the only sculpture in the 4th Impressionist Exhibition of 1879).

Edgar Degas was Gauguin's most admired contemporary artist and a great influence on his work from the beginning, in particular with his choice of figures and interiors as subject matter. It can also be seen in his interest in sculpture, such as this medallion, carved in mahogany and painted, of a singer **La Chanteuse Valérie Roumi** (1880).



The influence of the Impressionist technique of painting in short strokes and dabs of paint, in order to introduce atmosphere is clearly evident in the **Garden in Vaugirard (Painter's Family in the Garden in Rue Carcel)**, (1881). The child standing is Emile (1874–1955); the little girl seated, his daughter Aline (1877–1897), who was to die aged twenty; Clovis (1879–1900) the next, is possibly not included; and Jean René (1881–1961) in the pram, who was to become a notable sculptor. His youngest son Paul Rollon (1883–1961) was born two years later. He became a painter, art critic and biographer of his father and other artists. His son Paul René (1911–76) also became an artist and noted illustrator.

In 1882 the Paris stock market crashed and the art market severely contracted. Paul Durand-Ruel, the Impressionists' primary art dealer, was especially affected by the crash, and for a period of time stopped buying pictures from painters such as Gauguin.

Gauguin's earnings deteriorated sharply and over the next two years he slowly formulated his plans to become a full-time artist. The following two summers, he painted with Pissarro and occasionally Paul Cézanne. In October 1883, he wrote to Pissarro saying that he had decided to make his living from painting at all costs and asked for his help, which Pissarro at first readily provided.



The following January, Gauguin moved with his family to Rouen, where they could live more cheaply and where he thought he had discerned opportunities when visiting Pissarro there the previous summer. However, the venture proved unsuccessful, and by the end of the year Mette and the children moved to Copenhagen, Gauguin following shortly after in November 1884, bringing with him his art collection, which subsequently remained in Copenhagen.

The view depicted in **Blue Roofs in Rouen** (1884) perhaps betrays an influence of Cézanne, while the muted colours and the cut off figure in the lower left corner, suggesting the accidental informality of a photograph, maybe is inspired by the artist he admired most, Degas.



In Copenhagen he attempted to pursue a business career as a tarpaulin salesman. It was not a success: He could not speak Danish, and the Danes did not want French tarpaulins. Mette became the chief breadwinner, giving French lessons to trainee diplomats. Life in Copenhagen proved equally difficult and their marriage grew strained. At Mette's urging, supported by her family, because he had renounced the values they shared Gauguin returned to Paris the following year. His middle-class family and marriage fell apart after 11 years when Gauguin was driven to paint full-time. Gauguin's last physical contact with them was in 1889, Mette eventually breaking with him decisively in 1894.

### Van Gogh 1886 until February 1888

***“Normality is a paved road: It’s comfortable to walk, but no flowers grow on it.”***



In March 1886 van Gogh left the Netherlands, never to return, for Paris and the guidance of his brother Theo. He entered Paris as a shy, somber man and while his personality would never change, he emerged artistically into what one critic described as a "singing bird".

He shared Theo's small apartment in Montmartre, where he had arrived without warning. In June they they took a larger one at 54 rue Lepic.

The year after his arrival he painted this **Self-Portrait** (1887). In common with his compatriot, Rembrandt, van Gogh was to chart his life and the development of his style through many insightful self-portraits.

A selection of sketches. The life drawings were probably done while studying at Cormon's studio; while the studies of people in everyday situations would be from individuals who he had paid a small amount to pose for him, or sketched in the street.



In Paris Vincent painted portraits of friends and acquaintances, still-lives, views of Le Moulin de la Galette, Asnières and along the Seine. He studied at Fernand Cormon's studio in April and May, where he frequented the circle of the Australian artist John Russell, who painted his portrait in 1886. Van Gogh also met fellow students Émile Bernard, Louise Anquetin and Henri de Toulouse Lautrec – who in 1887 painted a **pastel portrait** of him.

Once in Paris Van Gogh saw the work of the Impressionists and accepted Theo's advice to paint with more colour and light and admitted that his previous works were out dated. He made several studies of the Moulin de la Galette, also known as the Blue Fin mill, which was near to their apartment in Montmartre.

The owners of the windmill maximized the view on the butte overlooking Paris, creating a terrace for viewing and a dance hall for entertainment.

While retaining some of the muted colours of his Dutch paintings **The Mill 'Le Blute Fin'** (1886) introduces notes of brighter colour and is painted with longer brushstrokes. The subject matter – the well dressed bourgeoisie and better off working class going about their leisurely week-end pursuits - contrasting with his earlier studies of downtrodden peasants, also reflects his familiarity with the Impressionist's style and technique.



Van Gogh painted **A Pair of Shoes** (c1886-87) from a pair of boots he purchased at a flea market. He wore the boots on an extended rainy walk to create the effect he wished for this painting, which may have been a tribute to the working man. The Van Gogh Museum speculates that they may also be symbolic for Van Gogh of his "difficult passage through life." Of his walking through mud to make the shoes look more worn and dirty, Van Gogh was known to say "*Dirty shoes and roses can both be good in the same way.*"



The muted colours suggest that it was painted early in his stay in Paris, before the experience of the brighter Impressionist palette had had its full effect on his vision.

In **Montmartre from the Moulin de la Galette** (1886), painted early in his stay with Theo, we can see the influence of the Impressionist techniques in the short dabs and strokes of paint to create atmosphere, and especially in the use of brighter colour. However, the layering of short, colourful brushstrokes marks the beginning of his distinctive mature style that he was to develop in Paris and later in Arles; a very personal technique which marks out the work of van Gogh as the entirely original and immediately recognisable style of a modern master.

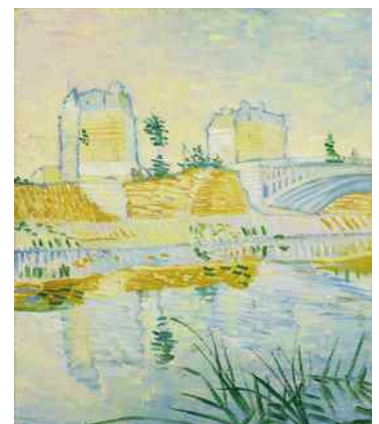


The apartment in Montmartre afforded him a beautiful view of the Paris skyline, which he painted several times. **View of Paris from Vincent's Room in the Rue Lepic** (1887) demonstrates several Neo-Impressionist techniques. To bring an intensity to his work, he uses complementary colours of red and green, and adapts the stippling technique, using tiny dots in areas where needed for detail and short brush strokes for the background.

Conflicts arose between the brothers. At the end of 1886 Theo found living with Vincent to be "almost unbearable". By early 1887, they were again at peace, and Vincent looking for more tranquil settings had moved to Asnières, a northwestern suburb of Paris, popular among artists and weekend trippers to the Island of Grande Jatte.

While staying with Émile Bernard and his parents he got to know Signac and adopted elements of Pointillism. The works, he made there include parks, restaurants, riverside settings, bridges and factories, and marks a breakthrough in his artistic development. He experimented with a lighter, more colourful palette. To his sister, Wil, he wrote, "*While painting at Asnières, I saw more colours than I have ever seen before.*"

Through the use of pale blues and lemon yellows Vincent bathes **Bridge of Asnières**, also called **The Seine with the Pont de Clichy** (1887) in Spring sunlight. Painted with very light colours, and with very pale blues to give the merest indication of shadow, this oil painting appears to be 'unfinished.' However, Vincent evidently regarded it as complete as he asked Theo to include it in a consignment of modern paintings to Hermanus Tersteeg, head of The Hague's branch of Goupil.





**Fishing in Spring, the Pont de Clichy**, likewise, creates a joyful effect of dappled sunlight on the gently rippling water.

We can see him experimenting with painting in small dots and dashes of pure colour, in the manner he adopted from Signac. As this detail from the bottom left corner shows his loosely applied brushstrokes appear to be mere 'abstract' marks, until seen in context with the whole painting.



This coloured pencil sketch of a **Window in the Bataille Restaurant** (1887) shows van Gogh's personal technique of drawing with short, parallel lines and cross-hatching.

**Agostina Segatori Sitting in the cafe Le Tambourin** (1887) depicts Agostina, a woman in her forties, smoking a cigarette while having her second glass of beer, evidenced by two saucers under the mug of beer. In demeanour and style, such as her clothing, make-up and hairstyle, she is a modern woman. She is wearing a fashionable hat. According to the style at the time, her jacket is a different design than her dress. A parasol sits on one of the seats next to her.



Van Gogh used the theme of a woman sitting at a small table, introduced by Impressionists, such as Degas and Manet. The table and stools were in the shape of tambourines, befitting the café's theme. On the wall behind her are van Gogh's Japanese prints, which he began exhibiting at the café in February 1887.

Agostina Segatori opened the Cafe du Tambourin, with money earned from modelling, as a gathering spot for Parisian writers, art critics and artists, and a place where their work could be exhibited. Impoverished artists who were unable to pay exchanged paintings for their meals, which then adorned the restaurant. Van Gogh had several meals a week there and soon the walls of the café were full of floral still life paintings. Theo and Vincent held a special exhibit of Japanese prints in the café.

In another failed love affair Vincent fell in love with Agostina who was twelve years older. Soon after, though, Agostina and the establishment fell on hard times. She became ill and the business, in debt and likely involved in illegal prostitution, failed. Although assured by Agostina that van Gogh could claim his paintings, according to Émile Bernard's recollection, debtors sold them "as waste canvas" in batches of 10, ranging in price from 50 centimes to one franc per bundle. Due to the bankruptcy of the cafe van Gogh lost not only the paintings, mostly still-life works of flowers, but also the frames.

Flowers were the subject of many of Van Gogh's paintings in Paris, due in great part to his regard for flowers, and his inability to pay for models to pose for portraits. He threw himself heartily into painting flowers: "red poppies, blue corn flowers and myosotis, white and red roses, yellow chrysanthemums."

He studied the art of flower arranging, and the works of Dutch masters, Japanese prints and the Impressionists. Expressing his enthusiasm for the subject he wrote to his sister Wil, "I painted almost nothing but flowers so I could get used to colours other than grey - pink, soft or bright green, light blue, violet, yellow, glorious red."

**Vase with Daisies and Anemones**, (1887) also known as **Flowers in a Blue Vase**, was painted late in Van Gogh's stay in Paris. The vase holds a lively selection of daisies and anemones made with a range of colours. Dark red-brown is enlivened by shades of yellow, pink and white. He carefully selected the flowers to give him shades of various shades of yellow. The vase is painted in a contrasting shade of blue. The use of broken strokes and dots of colour in his background brushstrokes reflect the techniques of Impressionism and Divisionism.



Constance Spry, the noted floral arranger who created guidelines for flower arranging as an art form, learned a great deal about "structure, style, form, balance, harmony and rhythm" from studying the paintings by great masters of flowers, including van Gogh.



**Two Cut Sunflowers** (1887) is one of a sequence of four paintings that van Gogh made in the summer of 1887. The second and third in the sequence were given to Paul Gauguin who hung them proudly in his Paris apartment above his bed. In the mid-1890s he sold them to fund his trip to the South Seas. The image of the four sunflowers was made on a large canvas. 43 x 61cm.

The genre called "sous-bois" was brought into prominence by artists of the Barbizon School and the Impressionists. In Paris, and later in Saint Remy and Auver, he made several paintings of under-growth.



In **Trees and Undergrowth**, (1887) Van Gogh portrays the play of light falling through the trees highlighting the ground plants in touches of white, yellow and red. The effect of the light and shade produces many shades of green which painted in short brush-strokes across the canvas. A horizon line is suggested by a line of yellow, suggesting a clearing beyond the cropping of trees and foliage.



While living in Antwerp in 1885 Vincent had become interested in Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock prints and had used them to decorate the walls of his studio.

The May 1886 issue of *Paris Illustré* magazine was entirely devoted to Japan, its history, climate and visual arts, and an explanation of life in Japan, such as its customs, religion, education, religion, and the nature of its people. The cover was illustrated with a Japanese print by Keisai Eisen, which inspired him to make **The Courtesan (after Eisen)** (1887).

The works of the Japanese ukiyo-e artists Hiroshige and Hokusai greatly influenced van Gogh, both for the subject matter and the style of flat patterns of colours without shadow. He copied and enlarged the image and created a bright yellow background and colourful kimono. Influenced by other Japanese prints, he added a "watery landscape" of bamboo and water lilies. Frogs and cranes, terms used in 19th century France for prostitutes, and a distant boat adorn the border.

**Julien François Tanguy** (1825 - 1894) was a paint grinder who sold art supplies and was also an art dealer. He was one of the first to offer van Gogh's paintings for sale. Nicknamed *Père* ("Father") Tanguy, his jovial demeanour and enthusiasm for art and artists made his shop one of the most favoured art supply shops in Paris. He was a father figure who shared his food and money with artists and showed their paintings with pride. Tanguy took paintings as payment for paints, which Émile Bernard said made entering his shop in Montmartre, full of Impressionist paintings, like "visiting a museum".



Van Gogh first met Paul Cézanne at Tanguy's shop; it was at that time, the only place where Cézanne's paintings were displayed. In 1886, two large exhibitions of the Neo-Impressionists were staged there for the first time, which brought public attention to Georges Seurat and Paul Signac.

Vincent made three paintings of Julien Tanguy. The three works demonstrate a progression in van Gogh's artistic style after his arrival in Paris. The first is sombre, and formed from a simple composition. The second (left) introduces van Gogh's Japanese prints. The last and most advanced in style, skill and colour (right) integrates Japanese, Impressionist and other influences on the Parisian artist community.

The painting contains a background of van Gogh's Japanese prints that were sold at Tanguy's shop. Mount Fuji appears behind Tanguy's hat, and actors share the wall with cherry trees in bloom. The Japanese paintings represent van Gogh's search for serenity, which he describes in a letter to his sister during this period, "*Having as much of this serenity as possible, even though one knows little – nothing – for certain, is perhaps a better remedy for all diseases than all the things that are sold at the chemist's shop.*" In an effort to capture serenity in his painting, Van Gogh paints Tanguy with a calm, contemplative nature, described by Historian of Symbolism Naomi Maurer, as having the "iconic tranquility of Buddha."

Following Tanguy's death in 1894, his daughter sold the *Portrait of Père Tanguy* to sculptor August Rodin.

In February 1888, feeling worn out from life in Paris, ill from drink and suffering from a smoker's cough, Van Gogh left, having painted more than 200 paintings during his two years there.

He sought refuge in Arles, which he equated to living in Japan. with thoughts of founding a colony of artists.

### **Gauguin Summer 1886 to October 1888** *"I have tried to establish the right to dare everything."*

Gauguin spent the summer of 1886 in the artist's colony of Pont Aven in Brittany. Many artists were attracted by the ancient way of life of the Breton people, and an artists' colony had grown up there. He was attracted in the first place because it was cheap to live there. However, he found himself an unexpected success with the young art students who flocked there in the summer. His naturally pugilistic temperament (he was both an accomplished boxer and fencer) was no impediment in the socially relaxed seaside resort. He was remembered during that period as much for his outlandish appearance as for his art. Amongst these new associates was the painter Charles Laval, who would accompany Gauguin the following year to Panama and Martinique.



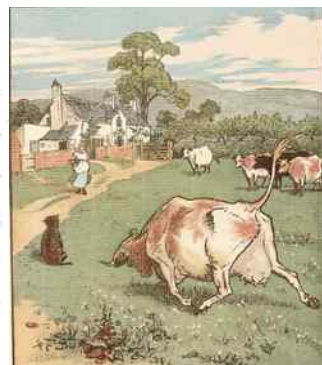
**Les lavandières à Pont-Aven** (1886) depicts women doing the washing in front of Saint-Guérolé mill, named after the hill which overlooks it. It was the last mill on the left bank before the sea and the penultimate of the town's 14 mills. It was subjected to the action of the tide, which reduced its milling time. The proximity of the port is evoked by the presence of a boat under sail at the quay.

Painted in the short brushstrokes and brighter pallet that he had developed under the influence of Pissarro and the Impressionists the composition with a sense of an enveloping atmosphere is still conventional, with little hint of the revolution in vision that he was yet to embark on at Pont-Aven.

Gauguin said:

*"I borrow some subject or other from life or from nature, and, using it as a pretext, I arrange lines and colours so as to obtain symphonies, harmonies that do not represent a thing that is real, in the vulgar sense of the word, and do not directly express any idea, but are supposed to make you think the way music is supposed to make you think, unaided by ideas or images, simply through the mysterious affinities that exist between our brains and such arrangements of colours and lines."*

In May 1886 he exhibited nineteen paintings and a wood relief at the eighth (and last) Impressionist exhibition, where he sold one of his paintings. **Women Bathing** (1885) introduced what was to become a recurring motif, the woman in the waves. This exhibition also established Georges Seurat as leader of the avant-garde movement in Paris. Gauguin contemptuously rejected Seurat's Neo-Impressionist, Pointillist technique and later in the year broke decisively with Pissarro, who from that point on was rather antagonistic towards Gauguin.



A popular guide-book on Brittany, by Henry Blackburn with the naive drawings of the English illustrator **Randolph Caldecott**, caught the imagination of the *avant-garde* student artists at Pont-Aven, anxious to free themselves from the conservatism of their academies, and Gauguin consciously imitated them in his sketches of Breton girls.

These sketches were later worked up into paintings back in his Paris studio. The most important of these is **Four Breton Women**, (1886) which shows a marked departure from his earlier Impressionist style as well as incorporating something of the naive quality of Caldecott's illustration, exaggerating features to the point of caricature.



Four young women are shown in conversation at one of the characteristic low walls that surround the properties in Brittany. Gauguin, however, was not interested in giving this wall and the figures a concise physicality, and thus also creating clear spatial relationships; rather, in this key work of his development, the artist's interest in two-dimensional decorative values is already noticeable. On the one hand, the overall picture structure is indicative of this, but on the other hand there are also parts such as the curved shapes of the white hoods and the patterned skirts. Gauguin's origins from Impressionism can be recognized by the undemanding motif,

the light colours and the small brushstrokes, which are of course remarkably organized and integrated into the system of almost carpet-like shapes. Three individual studies of the figures are known from the painting. Gauguin also varied the depiction on a fan and a vase, both of which he created shortly after the picture was created. The figures of the »Breton peasant women« shown here also appear in a lithograph and other paintings.



The painting known as **La Bergère Bretonne** (1886) was one of the first landscape pictures that Gauguin painted in Pont Aven, and has come to be regarded as an important transition from Impressionist influenced dabs of paint to his later Post-Impressionist style of outlined, flatter areas of colour. Gauguin has merged the outlines of the young girl, who plays a subordinate role, and the calf beside her, expressing the close connection of the country people's lives and the land they worked.



Paul Gauguin and Charles Laval both arrived at the Pension Gloanec in Pont-Aven in 1886 and became friends. Laval's paintings, such as **Going to Market, Brittany**, betray many of the concerns that preoccupied Gauguin: the flattening of space, the emphasis on contour and colour etc. Laval died of an illness complicated by tuberculosis in 1894 at the age of 32.

### Panama and Martinique, April to November 1887

In 1887, in search of an exoticism that could provide the key to art, Gauguin and Laval went first to Panama and then from June to November on the Caribbean island of Martinique. To raise some money Laval painted academic portraits (all lost), using his experience received from Leon Bonnat, his professor at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Gauguin completed eleven known paintings, including **Bord de Mer II**. They arrived in Martinique by way of Panama, where they had found themselves broke and without a job. At the time France had a policy of repatriation where if a citizen became broke or stranded on a French colony, the state would pay for the boat ride back. Upon leaving Panama, protected by the repatriation policy, Gauguin and Laval decided to get off the boat at the Martinique port of St Pierre. In Martinique Laval made a small series of landscapes speckled with bright colours, that have been erroneously attributed to Gauguin in the past.





*“I shut my eyes in order to see.”*

It was in Martinique that Gauguin finally broke away from Impressionism, and forged his own, unique and personal vision. Trees, sea and mountains are brought into a unified whole in ***Martinique Landscape***. The coloration is enhanced, to the point of rendering the soil red.

They traveled widely and apparently came into contact with a small community of Indian immigrants; a contact that would later influence his art through the incorporation of Indian symbols. Gauguin, in his search for and the embodiment of the 'primitive' in his art attacked what he saw as the corrupt and the decadent aesthetic of the West by asserting the values of strength, simplicity, crudeness and purity that he found in non-Western forms of art.

The writer Lafcadio Hearn was also on the island at that time. His account, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, provides an historical background with which to view Gauguin's images.

*“Do not copy nature. Art is an abstraction. Rather, bring your art forth by dreaming in front of her and think more of creation.”*

In his first tropical landscapes with figures he set out to represent the gestures and activities that were assumed to embody the essential character of the people.

***Women in a Mango Grove*** is a sea of rippling greens and yellows, in which the fiery red roof and wall of a small hut sings out.

*“Colour which, like music, is a matter of vibrations, reaches what is most general and therefore most indefinable in nature: its inner power.”*



***Among the Mangoes*** is a near abstraction.

From the blue of the foreground figure a stepping movement leads up through the bent figure to the figure in the background reaching up into the trees in a single unbroken linked set of shapes, which have the effect of simultaneously indicating distance and transposing the forms into a flattened, horizontal picture plane in which hieratic figures and fluid individual brushmarks combine to construct a world that appears both observed and dreamed.

*“Colour! What a deep and mysterious language, the language of dreams.”*

Gauguin completed eleven known paintings in Martinique, including ***Coming and Going, Martinique***. The works as a whole are brightly coloured, loosely painted, outdoor figural scenes. His thoughts and experiences during this time are recorded in his letters to his wife Mette and his artist friend Emile Schuffenecker.

Figures sit or stand alongside a flaming orange path which runs into the picture through a rich green field in “a pastoral fantasy of a faraway world.... palm trees and straw huts, cane fields and fruit trees coexist with goats and sheep, chickens and hens, contributing to the sense of a rural idyll in which nature provides and nurtures.” He reused and recycled his figures from sketches over and over again, “changing scale and setting while replaying the essential ingredients of his island pastoral.”





Many of his paintings seem to be derived from his hut, as in **Near the Huts** (1887). His letters to Schuffenecker express an excitement about the exotic location and natives represented in his paintings. The works as a whole are brightly coloured, loosely painted, outdoor figural scenes.

At first, the 'negro hut' in which they lived suited him, and he enjoyed watching people in their daily activities. However, the weather in the summer was hot and the hut leaked in the rain. Gauguin also suffered dysentery and marsh fever.

Rural and indigenous populations remained a popular subject in Gauguin's work after he left the island; and although his time on the island was short, it was influential in the direction his art was to take in the future.

**“Poor artist! You gave away part of your soul when you painted the picture which you are now trying to dispose of.”**

Gauguin's Martinique paintings were exhibited at his colour merchant Arsène Poitier's gallery. There they were seen and admired by Vincent and Theo, who purchased three paintings for 900 francs and arranged to have them hung at Goupil's, thus introducing Gauguin to wealthy clients. At the same time, Vincent and Gauguin became close friends (on Vincent's part it amounted to something akin to adulation) and they corresponded together on art, a correspondence that was instrumental in Gauguin formulating his philosophy of art.

### **Return to Pont-Aven, summer 1888**

Along with Émile Bernard, Charles Laval, Émile Schuffenecker and many others, Gauguin re-visited Pont-Aven. He wrote to Schuffenecker *“I like Brittany. Here I find a savage, primitive quality. When my wooden shoes echo on this granite ground, I hear the dull, muted, powerful sound I am looking for in painting.”*

The bold use of pure colour and Symbolist choice of subject matter in **The Swineherd** (1888), a scene of a peasant tending pigs, distinguish what is now called the Pont-Aven school.



Disappointed with Impressionism, Gauguin felt that traditional European painting had become too imitative and lacked symbolic depth. By contrast, the art of Africa and Asia seemed to him full of mystic symbolism and vigour. There was a vogue in Europe at the time for the art of other cultures, especially that of Japan .



**Les Danseuses'** (1888), depicting three girls in Breton costume, was painted after his return from Martinique we see the heightened and exaggerated use of colour; the flattening of the forms; and the emphasis on pattern at the expense of atmosphere and depth. These three young ladies inhabit and seem to be part of a convincing landscape, wedded to and inseparable from its very form and shape; but it is a landscape of the imagination, totally constructed and totally new. And as such it compels the viewer to see the real world through the artist's eyes. This is how art makes the world that we perceive.

In October 1888 the young painter Paul Sérusier, age twenty-four, travelled to Pont-Aven with a letter of introduction to Gauguin. There he painted **The Bois d'Amour at Pont Aven**, better known as **The Talisman**, under Gauguin's close supervision. The picture was an extreme exercise in Synthetism that approximated to pure abstraction.

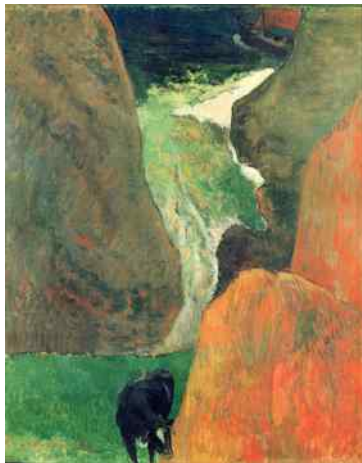
Sérusier later described his experience to Maurice Denis, who recounted it later in his own book. Sérusier and Gauguin had walked to the Bois d'Amour, a particularly picturesque landscape of forest and rocks along the river Aven, not far from the village. There, according to Sérusier's account to Denis, Gauguin told him: *“How do you see these trees? They're yellow. So, put some yellow. This shadow, it's rather blue, paint it with pure ultramarine. Those red*





leaves? Put vermillion." The result was a painting with pure and flat colours, which represented not a representation of the scene, but the visual sensations of the painter.

His friends, the future Nabis, gave the small painting the name *The Talisman*, and made it the emblem of their new movement. Describing the first presentation of the painting Maurice Denis wrote in 1903, "*Thus we were presented, for the first time, in a form that was paradoxical and unforgettable, the fertile concept of a flat surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.*" An often quoted proposition which became the central argument of modern art in general, and abstract (none representational) art in particular.



In *Seascape With Cow* (1888), a view of the sea surging between rocks, Gauguin has created an abstract swirl of colour and form. He constructs the shapes from small dashes of colour, in a latent Impressionist manner, but with the emphasis on the outline they become interlocked within the shape of the painting, while each exerting its individual presence. Although having an informal almost casual air, it is in fact carefully composed. The rule of complementaries is followed: red/orange against green in the foreground, mauve/purple in the middle-ground and deep blue of the sea at the background, top of the painting, with a flick of red sail, which brings the eye back to the flattened shapes at the front.

The young twenty year old art student Émile Bernard had met Gauguin briefly in Pont-Aven in 1886. Two years later he walked from Paris to Pont-Aven to meet him again. In addition to painting Bernard was a theorist and writer and had developed many theories about his artwork and what he wanted it to be.

They became close friends and collaborators, exchanging ideas about aesthetic principles that dramatically shaped their own works and the direction of Modern art leading into the 20th century. Bernard stated that he had "*a desire to [find] an art that would be of the most extreme simplicity and that would be accessible to all, so as not to practice its individuality, but collectively...*" For his own part Gauguin was impressed by the ability of Bernard to verbalize his ideas.

Bernard's painting, *Breton Women in the Meadow (Le Pardon de Pont-Aven)*, is a highly abstracted view of Breton men, women, and children in a vivid green field, remarkable for its flat, vibrant colour, bold lines, and simplified imagery: a rich yellow-green background is complemented by punctuations of red, such as the woman's umbrella in the upper left and the young girl's apron near the centre. The style, with its emphasis on clear flat shapes, outlined in black, came to be known as Cloisonnism.



In a letter to van Gogh in September Bernard included a sketch of the painting. When Gauguin later went to Arles to paint with van Gogh he took the painting along with him. It had a great impact on Vincent and impelled him to further simplify his forms.



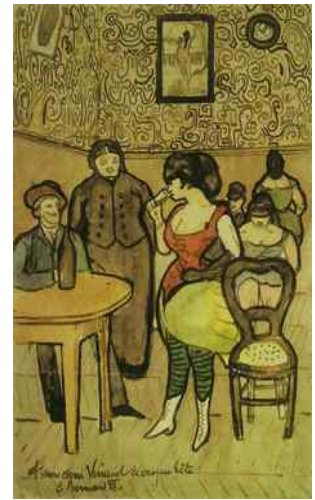
*Still-life with Three Puppies* (1888) is composed of flattened forms, the bold shapes outlined in black, typical of the Cloisonnist style. The bold use of pure colour and Symbolist choice of subject matter distinguish what is now called the Pont-Aven School.

Implausibly the puppies lapping at a bowl of milk seem to be standing on a white, patterned tablecloth; behind but on the same visual plane as the diagonal formed by the three evenly spaced goblets and grapes (or possibly very small apples.) The other small bowl with fruit, and the white cloth with a group of three fruits, plus two isolated fruits appears to sit on a different plane. The bottom edge of this triangular wedge shape, with another three equally spaced objects, makes another diagonal connecting with the first just outside of the picture.

In arranging his objects in a flattened perspective in this way, evocative of Japanese compositional patterning, it has been suggested that Gauguin was playing a visual numbers game, or putting one in mind of a child's counting rhyme. If so no literary explanation has so far emerged, and Gauguin didn't offer one.

Cloisonné is decorative work in which enamel, glass, or gemstones are separated by strips of flattened wire placed edgewise on a metal backing. The 'cloisonnist' style of painting developed by Bernard imitates this by outlining in black simplified flat colour shapes. Typical of the style is the watercolour sketch of a **Brothel Scene** by Bernard. He sent it with a dedication to Vincent in Arles. Vincent sent it on to Theo with a request that he buy something, if not too expensive, from Bernard.

However, when he first posted his letter he miss-addressed it and it had been opened and returned to him. He told Theo that he was amused to think that when the staff at the post office opened it this scene of a brothel dropped out.



Van Gogh knew that Japanese print-makers often exchanged work with one another, saying that *'It clearly proves that they liked one another and stuck together, and that there was a certain harmony among them [ . . . ] The more we resemble them in that respect, the better it will be for us.'* The idea appealed to him, so he suggested that he, Paul Gauguin and Emile Bernard should do the same:

Bernard's **Self-portrait with Gauguin - portrait for Vincent** puts the drawing of Gauguin in the centre and himself edging in a little diffidently from the side.

In his own **Self Portrait with Portrait of Bernard** Gauguin portrayed himself in the guise of Jean Valjean, the main character of Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, equating the vibrant and loving fictional outcast with the misunderstood artists of his time. He wrote: *'By doing him with my features, you have my individual image, as well as a portrait of us all, poor victims of society, taking our revenge on it by doing good'*. The cheerful floral pattern on the wall was Gauguin's way of testifying to *'our artistic virginity.'*

Van Gogh was impressed by the portrait's melancholy character. He described the shadows in Gauguin's face as *'lugubriously tinged with blue'* and noted that he looked ill and tormented.'



**"I do not paint by copying nature. Everything I do springs from my wild imagination."**



By Bernard's account, his *Breton Women* inspired Gauguin, who adopted the former's style for the major painting **Vision After the Sermon (Jacob wrestling with the angel)**. It represents a hallucinatory image, before a group of pious Breton women, of Jacob wrestling an angel against a fiery red background. Gauguin's dramatic painting went beyond Bernard's in terms of symbolic content. The synthesis of real and unreal achieved in this painting would continue to inform Gauguin's works throughout his career.

This large work includes peasant women leaving the church in the lower part of the canvas; above them is the vision of Jacob wrestling with the angel, which was the sermon of the day. Gauguin attempts to combine in one setting two levels of reality, the everyday world and the dream world. The lower figures are reduced to areas of flat patterns, without modelling or perspective. The large colour areas are intense and without shadows. The design is so strong that the two realities fuse into one visual experience.

Gauguin and Bernard organized the first exhibition of Synthetist artists at the Café Volpini in 1889 during the Paris World's Fair. However, tensions arose between the two men, and they ultimately had a falling out in 1891. The breaking point came when an article identified Gauguin as the originator of the Synthetist movement, to Bernard's great frustration. Nonetheless, their work together for that brief period in Pont-Aven helped shape the development of Avant-Garde art.

1888 was a seminal year in the history of Modern art . After many delays and exchanges of letters, and with the encouragement and financial assistance from Theo, on 23<sup>rd</sup> October Gauguin arrived in Arles. Until 23<sup>rd</sup> December Gauguin and van Gogh worked together. Gauguin had brought his new style from Pont-Aven exemplified in *Vision After the Sermon (Jacob wrestling with the angel)*, which he took with him to Arles, along with Bernard's *Le Pardon de Pont-Aven*

Gallery:

### Van Gogh



**Boy Cutting Grass with a Sickie** watercolour 1881



**Fish Drying Barn** watercolour 1882



**Weaver Near an Open Window** 1884



**Avenue of Poplars in Autumn** 1884



**Potato Planting** 1884



**View of the Roofs of Paris** 1886



**Backyards of Old House in Antwerp in the Snow** 1885



**Interior of a Restaurant** 1887



**Wheatfield with a Partridge** 1887

### Gauguin:



**Path in the Forest** 1873



**Rouen, L'Eglise Saint Quen** 1884



**Design for a Fan: French Landscape after Cézanne** 1885



**Children Wrestling II** 1888



**Still Life with Japanese Print** 1888



**The Wave** 1888