

Artist Resources – Paul Gauguin (French, 1848 – 1903)

[Gauguin at the National Gallery of Art](#)

[Gauguin at the Met](#)

[Gauguin at the Guggenheim](#)



Gauguin, c. 1891

Gauguin had a complicated relationship with fellow artist and mentee, Vincent van Gogh. The two [shared a love of Japan](#), engaging in [Japonisme](#) at a similar time. They even spent [nine weeks as roommates](#) in 1888. Read about how this [tumultuous friendship](#) led van Gogh to dramatically slice off a portion of his ear.

On his first visit to Tahiti (1891-1893), the artist wrote [Noa Noa](#), a travelogue and dramatic, semi-fictionalized autobiography. During a retrospective exhibition at the Fondation Beyeler in 2015, [actor Keanu Reeves read from the text](#).

In 1988, the exhibition *The Art of Paul Gauguin* was co-presented by the [National Gallery of Art](#), the Musée d'Orsay, and the [Art Institute of Chicago](#). Read reviews of the exhibition in the [Washington Post](#) and the [New York Times](#). A digitized version of the accompanying catalogue is also available for [download](#).

Read a 2011 [interview with Mette Gauguin](#), the artist's great-granddaughter, upon the closing of Gauguin's retrospective at the Tate. Take a virtual [walkthrough](#) of the exhibition with curator Christine Riding.

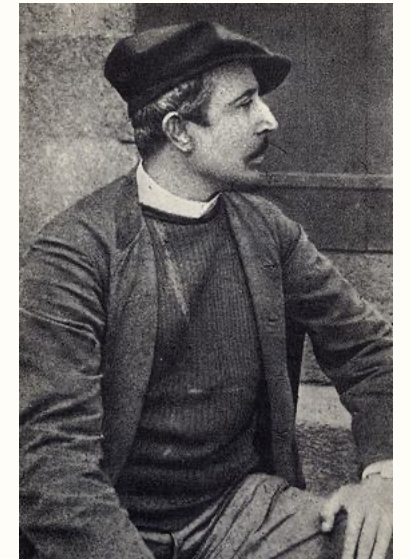
MoMA's 2014 exhibition, [Gauguin: Metamorphoses](#), focused on the artist's prints and transfer drawings.

[Paul Gauguin: The Art of Invention](#) was on display at the Saint Louis Art Museum in 2019. The exhibition featured 90 paintings, wood carvings, ceramics, prints, and writings that illustrate the artist's wide engagement with media. Watch a [video](#) about the exhibition and listen to the [audio guide](#).

Gauguin is a controversial figure in modern and contemporary art history. In the wake of #metoo movements, Farah Naveri asked in the New York Times: [“Is It Time Gauguin Got Canceled?”](#). The article outlines how “museums are assessing the legacy of an artist who had sex with teenage girls and called the Polynesian people he painted ‘savages.’” The controversy was especially charged around an [exhibition of portraits](#) by the artist at the National Gallery. Read about [how curators addressed the artist and his legacy](#) in that exhibition. In 2021, Tiare Tuuhia wrote an article to give more agency to his Tahitian muse, Teha'amana, entitled [“The Tahitian Woman Behind Paul Gauguin's Paintings”](#).

In 2020, London's Courtauld Gallery acquired [Avant et après](#), Gauguin's memoir/manifesto that had not been seen publicly since the 1920s. Read a [complete scan of the manuscript](#) and [watch a video](#) about this important primary source in modern art history. Martin Baily wrote their [thoughts](#) in The Art newspaper about Gauguin taking credit for van Gogh's famous sunflowers.

The 2022 exhibition [Paul Gauguin – Why Are You Angry](#) at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin juxtaposes Gauguin's work, “which was also shaped by Western, colonial ideas of ‘the exotic’ and ‘the erotic’” with historical material and international contemporary art.



Gauguin, 1888 in Pont-Aven



Paul Gauguin (French, 1848-1903)

Tahiti (Personnages de 'Que sommes-nous?'), 1897

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:184.9

Post-Impressionist and Symbolist painter Paul Gauguin left Paris for Tahiti in 1891, moving there permanently four years later. In 1897, the artist was suffering numerous health ailments, had debilitating debts, and received word that his daughter, Aline, had died of pneumonia. **Tahiti (Personnages de 'Que sommes-nous?')** is one of many paintings Gauguin completed that year inspired by a Christian catechism asking: "Where does humanity come from?" "Where is it going to?" and "How does humanity proceed?" Though the monumental canvas *D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* is his most famous painting on this subject, Gauguin completed eight other thematically similar works and mailed the series to dealer Ambroise Vollard (1866-1939) for inclusion in a Paris exhibition in 1898. This is one of the smaller paintings that details a section of the larger work. Focusing on the Eve-like figure picking fruit in the center of the narrative, it highlights what Gauguin saw as the sinful phase of the human life cycle.

On view April 13 – July 17, 2022



*D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous?
Où allons-nous? (Where do we come
from? What are we? Where are we
going?), 1897-1898*

Oil on canvas,
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston