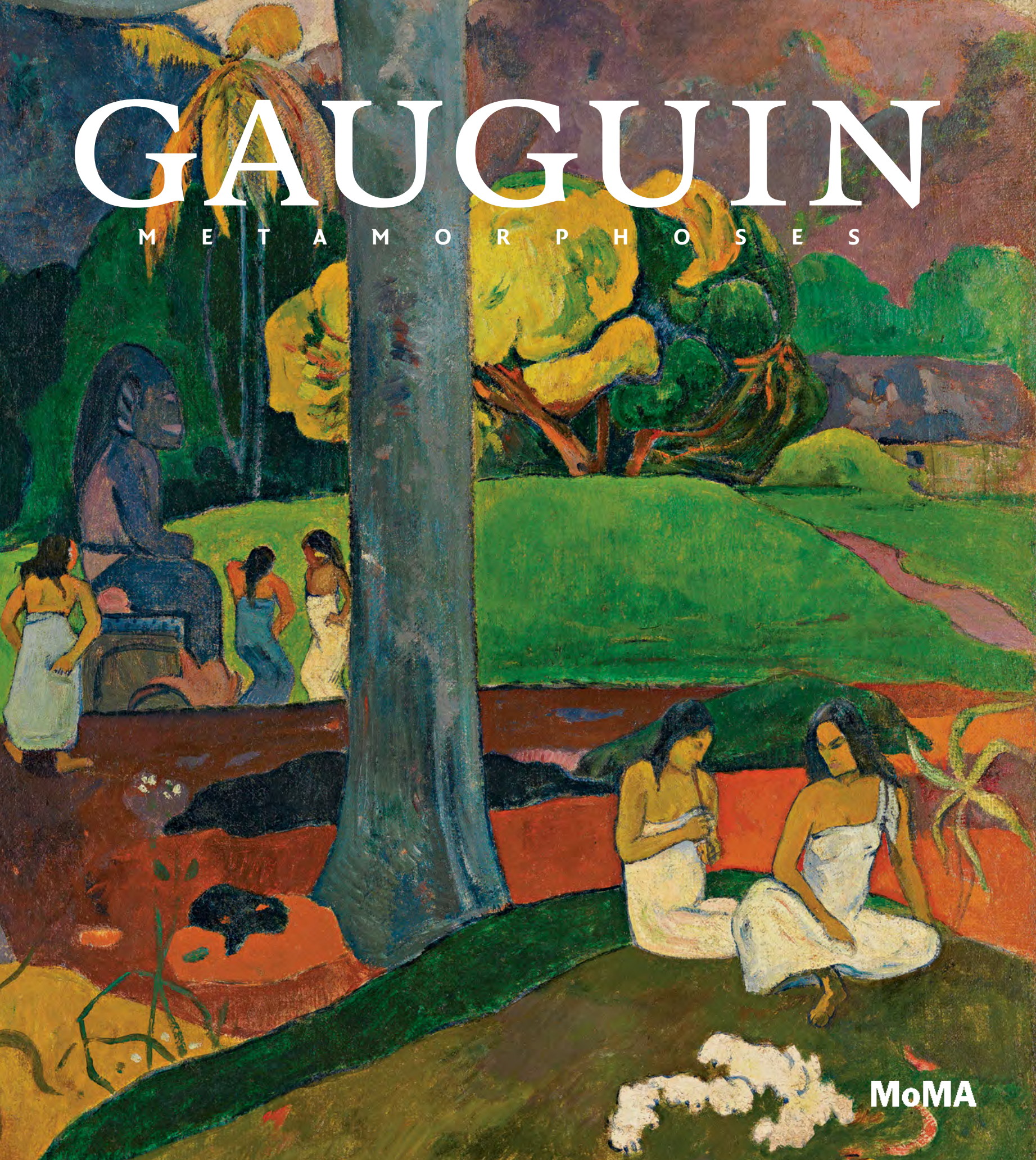


GAUGUIN

M E T A M O R P H O S E S



MoMA



Starr Figura

*With essays by
Elizabeth C. Childs, Hal Foster,
and Erika Mosier*

*The Museum of Modern Art,
New York*

GAUGUIN
M E T A M O R P H O S E S

Published in conjunction with the exhibition *Gauguin: Metamorphoses* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 8–June 8, 2014. Organized by Starr Figura, The Phyllis Ann and Walter Borten Associate Curator, with Lotte Johnson, Curatorial Assistant, in the Department of Drawings and Prints

The exhibition is supported by Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III, Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, and by Denise LeFrak in memory of Ethel LeFrak.

Additional funding is provided by the MoMA Annual Exhibition Fund.

This exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

This publication is supported by the Riva Castleman Fund for Publications in the Department of Drawings and Prints, established by The Derald H. Ruttenberg Foundation.

Produced by the Department of Publications
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Edited by Kyle Bentley
Designed by Margaret Bauer
Production by Matthew Pimm
Typeset by Mary Gladue
Map by Adrian Kitzinger
Printed and bound by Trifolio, s.r.l., Verona

This book is typeset in Quadraat and Quadraat Sans.
The paper is 135 gsm GardaPat 13 Kiara.

Published by The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019
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Distributed in the United States and Canada by
ARTBOOK | D.A.P.
155 Sixth Avenue, 2nd floor
New York, New York 10013
www.artbook.com

Distributed outside the United States and Canada by
Thames and Hudson Ltd.
181A High Holborn
London WC1V 7QX
www.thamesandhudson.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013950971
ISBN: 978-0-87070-905-0

Printed in Italy

Artworks titled by Gauguin, in French or Tahitian, are noted with their original titles first, followed by established English titles, usually those given in the catalogues raisonnés listed on page 222. Those not known to have been titled by Gauguin are presented in English only.

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Foreword

Gauguin: Metamorphoses is an exhibition of the work of a very well-known artist, Paul Gauguin, but it focuses on an aspect of his work that is less well known: his rare and extraordinary prints and transfer drawings, created between 1889 and the year of his death, 1903. Painting was the constant in Gauguin's life as an artist, yet, as this exhibition dramatically demonstrates, his engagement with other mediums, including sculpture, drawing, and printmaking, ignited his creativity. He repeated and recombined key motifs from one image to another, allowing them to metamorphose over time and across mediums. Of the approximately 160 works of art in the exhibition, some three-quarters are works on paper and approximately one-quarter are paintings and sculptures—an inversion of the usual ratio of mediums in a retrospective—foregrounding elements of the artist's oeuvre that are typically sidelined and yet are arguably even more radical and inventive than his justly celebrated paintings.

The Museum of Modern Art has long recognized the groundbreaking significance of Gauguin's place in the history of modernism. His major painting *Hina Tefatou (The Moon and the Earth)* and several of his woodcuts were among the earliest works to enter the collection, in 1934, just five years after the Museum opened. Since then, the Museum's holdings have grown to include six paintings, two drawings, two oil transfer drawings, and twenty-six prints by Gauguin. In addition, his impact on the generation of artists that emerged in the early years of the twentieth century is visible in many of the paradigmatic works that are at the core of MoMA's collection.

Although Gauguin's work was highlighted in MoMA's very first presentation—the landmark 1929 exhibition *Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, Van Gogh*, organized by Alfred H. Barr, Jr.—and although it has always figured significantly both in the Museum's permanent collection displays and in

its group shows on the history of modernism, a major monographic exhibition is long overdue. *Gauguin: Metamorphoses* is the first such exhibition dedicated to the artist ever to be presented at MoMA. It is also the first major exhibition of Gauguin's work in New York in more than a decade and only the second since 1959. As such, it will provide New York audiences with a rare opportunity to evaluate Gauguin's achievements and to celebrate his importance as a pioneer of modern art. Many of the works included have rarely—if ever—been shown in New York.

The exhibition and publication have been conceived and organized with intelligence and sensitivity by Starr Figura, The Phyllis Ann and Walter Borten Associate Curator of Drawings and Prints, with the essential assistance of Lotte Johnson, Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Drawings and Prints. We are profoundly grateful to Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III, Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro, and Denise LeFrak for their generous support of the exhibition, as well as to the MoMA Annual Exhibition Fund. We appreciate the support of the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, which has provided a generous indemnity. This publication is supported by the Riva Castleman Fund for Publications in the Department of Drawings and Prints, established by The Derald H. Ruttenberg Foundation. On behalf of the trustees and staff of The Museum of Modern Art, I also want to express my deepest thanks to the lenders who have briefly parted with treasured and in many cases extremely fragile works in order to ensure the success of this project.

GLENN D. LOWRY
Director, The Museum of Modern Art



STARR FIGURA

Gauguin's Metamorphoses: Repetition, Transformation, and the Catalyst of Printmaking

Over the course of his career, Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) was constantly striving to innovate and to find fresh outlets for his creativity. More than any other artist of his era, he drew inspiration from the process of working across mediums. Although he is most celebrated as a pioneer of modern painting, at various points in his career Gauguin also engaged with wood carving, ceramics, lithography, woodcut printing, monotype, drawing, and transfer drawing, as well as writing.¹ Such engagement stemmed from his profound interest in trying out new methods and materials, often with the idea that using less familiar mediums in inventive ways or taking a synthetic approach to disparate art forms could result in original types of works. Nevertheless, many of the works he produced by these means are tied to his earlier paintings or sculptures, for his creative process involved repeating and recombining motifs from one work to another, and allowing them to metamorphose over time and across mediums.

Of all the mediums to which Gauguin applied himself, printmaking served as the greatest catalyst in this process of transformation. Since printmaking involves transferring and multiplying images, it provided him with an especially fertile means for experimenting with methods of repeating, transposing, and manipulating his imagery. Through printmaking, Gauguin also found that the distinctions between painting, sculpture, and drawing could be bridged or even dissolved. When one examines the trajectory of his involvement with printing processes, the experimental and hybrid nature of his practice comes clearly into focus.

Gauguin was not the most prolific of the artists who contributed to the major printmaking revival that took place in Paris in the late nineteenth century. However, as we shall see, the significance of the medium to him is conveyed not in the number of individual compositions he made, of which fewer than eighty lithographs (or zincographs), etchings, and woodcuts are known,² but rather in the degree to which he experimented when printing them, often creating small “editions” of unique variants that together add up to hundreds of singular works. He also made at least 139 watercolor monotypes, gouache monotypes, and oil transfer drawings, all of which are essentially hybrids of drawings and prints.³ His usage of printmaking and transfer drawing occurred in several discrete bursts of activity over the period from 1889 until his death in 1903. These distinct intervals came at significant moments in his career: when he had recently completed a major body of paintings or

Opposite: *Two Marquesans* (detail, pl. 168). c. 1902

sculptures or was otherwise at a crossroads. Printmaking often provided a crucial creative impetus when he had difficulty painting. His three major cycles of prints—the *Volpini Suite* (1889), *Noa Noa* (*Fragrant Scent*, 1893–94), and the *Vollard Suite* (1898–99)—also played a summative role within his oeuvre,⁴ serving as condensed visual compendiums of the major subjects and themes from his earlier paintings and sculptures. A major group of watercolor monotypes from 1894, a small body of watercolor and gouache monotypes from around 1896 to 1902, and a large body of oil transfer drawings from approximately 1899 to 1903 tended to serve as more informal, individual meditations on Gauguin’s earlier themes or, less frequently, as tools to help the artist develop new imagery.

A self-taught artist who gave up an early career as a stockbroker in order to devote himself to his art, Gauguin scorned the traditional methods of the art academies and eagerly took up new materials without attempting to receive formal training. Charismatic, egotistical, and combative, he had a driving conviction in his own genius and originality. He felt himself to be noble both by birth (as the descendent of an aristocratic family that had settled in Peru) and by calling (he had abandoned a comfortable, bourgeois life to stake a claim in the Parisian intellectual and creative elite). He despised convention and the rote adherence to accepted ideas (in the realms not only of art but also of religion and sexuality), and lived much of his life as an itinerant wanderer, joining the navy as a young man and sailing the world, and later, as an artist, living for extended periods in Martinique, Brittany, Arles, and finally Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands, always in the hope of connecting with a more “primitive” or “authentic” reality. Gauguin’s art and ideas often ran counter to the facts of his life. His early childhood was spent in Lima, and he later touted these exotic beginnings as proof that he was “a savage,” even though his was a pampered and privileged existence in Peru.⁵ And although he denounced the corruption of Western culture and ultimately left Europe for good to live in the South Pacific (abandoning his wife and five children in the process), he never stopped courting the approval of the avant-garde in Paris. He was conscious at

all times of his public image and worked to project the mythic, larger-than-life persona of an avant-garde individualist and a savage.⁶

Like most modern painters and sculptors who took up printmaking, Gauguin pursued the medium partly as a means of marketing his paintings and making them better known: by creating works on paper that exist in multiple copies and that would thus be less costly to purchase than a painting, he could circulate his images and ideas more widely. If a bit of money could be gained in the process, so much the better. Translating a painted image into a printed one was also a stimulating way of reimagining or reconceiving it in new aesthetic terms. In 1889, for his first prints, the *Volpini Suite* zincographs, Gauguin borrowed motifs from lush, colorful paintings he made following travels in France and to the Caribbean and pared them down to essentials of line; with fewer background details, less modeling of the figures, and an increased flattening of perspective, the prints present the subjects of the paintings in more stylized and abstract terms. Such formal adjustments are also found in Gauguin’s subsequent print projects, but in addition, starting with the *Noa Noa* suite, his engagement with the physical processes of printing and with the conceptual significance of repetition and transformation became much deeper and more meaningful. It was with these later works, created either in the South Pacific or in France but with the memory of Tahiti in mind, that copying and reproduction became central to Gauguin’s practice.

On both occasions when Gauguin set sail for Tahiti from France (first in 1891, and then in 1895), he took with him a trunk of photographs and reproductions of art and artifacts that he admired, as well as books and his own drawings, sketchbooks, and manuscripts—a portable reference library he would continually turn to for inspiration. Gauguin, the first major European artist to look seriously at the art of non-Western (“primitive”) cultures, had images of works from South America, India, Egypt, China, Java, and Japan. He also had reproductions of Western masterpieces, including sculptural friezes from the Parthenon and paintings by Cranach, Rembrandt, Manet, Degas, and Odilon Redon,

fig. 1

Isidore van Kinsbergen. Photograph of reliefs from the temple of Borobudur, Java, showing *The Meeting of Buddha and the Three Monks on the Benares Road* (upper register) and *The Arrival of Maitrakanyaka at Nandana* (lower register). 1874. Albumen photograph from a glass-plate negative, 10 × 11 1/2" (25.5 × 30 cm). Fabrice Fourmanoir Collection, Papeete, Tahiti



among others. In addition, he collected and referred to ethnographic photographs and postcards of scenic views and “exotic” people.⁷ He mentioned these various items in a letter he wrote to Redon in September 1890, about six months before departing for his first Tahitian voyage, saying: “Gauguin is finished here [in France], one will see nothing more of him. You see that I am an egoist. I am taking away photographs, drawings, a whole little world of comrades who will chat with me every day.”⁸ Gauguin’s affection for and dependency on these secondhand images, which, as he realized, would become substitutes for direct contact with other artists and friends, as well as for actual artworks in European museums, suggests the degree to which his consciousness would become “saturated by reproduction.”⁹

Gauguin often used one of these reproductions as the source for a painting. He might then use the painting he

created from this reproduction as the source for a print, or more than one print, or even another painting, over the course of a number of years. One of the photographs that he most famously used in this way (fig. 1) shows two sculpted friezes in the Buddhist temple of Borobudur (on the island of Java): *The Meeting of Buddha and the Three Monks on the Benares Road* appears at the top, and *The Arrival of Maitrakanyaka at Nandana* at the bottom.¹⁰ Gauguin used the poses of the Buddha figure at the center of the top frieze and the Maitrakanyaka figure at the right of the bottom frieze as the basis for a number of female figures, including a Tahitian version of Eve that he portrayed in various mediums in a series of works titled *Nave nave fenua* (*Delightful Land*; pls. 50, 52–58, 60).¹¹ He also appropriated two of the three figures from the left side of the top frieze, changing their sex from male to female and using them as the basis for the

supplicants paying homage to a Tahitian virgin and child in one of his first great Tahitian canvases, *Ia orana Maria* (Hail Mary, 1891; fig. 2). Subsequently, he transformed this virgin and child in a zincograph and at least two monotypes (pls. 114–16). Figures based on one or more of the Borobudur figures can also be spotted in an assortment of later works, including the canvas *Faa iheihe* (Tahitian Pastoral, 1898; pl. 117) and the woodcut *Changement de résidence* (Change of Residence, 1899; pl. 136).

By appropriating found subjects and subtly adjusting them (turning the male Borobudur figures into females and covering their bodies in Tahitian pareus or classical drapery, for example), Gauguin transformed other artists' creations into his own. Then, by refracting the motifs through several images (sometimes in multiple mediums) and placing them in combination with other motifs, he translated them into still newer forms, distancing them further from the originals, taking greater possession of them for himself, and imbuing them each time with fresh meaning and resonance. Thus, reproduction was fundamental to Gauguin's process, first in the form of finding external sources to incorporate, and then as an ongoing method of production within his own practice.¹² Gauguin's repetition can be likened to the recitation that is at the heart of all kinds of learning, and indeed it was a method for him to absorb the formal lessons of another artist's work to the point where they became second nature.¹³ His copies are not faithful reproductions but translated versions, and, as Richard Brettell has proposed, the artist's itinerant life and experience of many ports of call where different languages were spoken suggest that he was likely acutely aware of "the transformative power" of the act of translation, whether verbal or visual.¹⁴ His desire to appropriate and transform was also reflected in his life, as he sought to transform himself from cultured European to primitive other. Gauguin self-mockingly acknowledged his efforts at visual metamorphosis when he wrote, "He traces a drawing, then he traces this tracing, and so on till the moment when, like the ostrich, with his head in the sand, he decides that it does not resemble the original any longer. Then!! He signs."¹⁵



fig. 2
Ia orana Maria (Hail Mary). 1891. Oil on canvas,
44 3/4 × 34 1/2" (113.7 × 87.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York. Bequest of Sam A. Lewisohn

In this process of copying and translating, Gauguin frequently fused seemingly unrelated content, most typically Christian archetypes and references to indigenous Polynesian culture, as seen in *Ia orana Maria* and *Nave nave fenua*. Such combinations are key to understanding Gauguin's art, which derived much of its power from the mysterious, often paradoxical nature of dualities. Further, he often used hybrid techniques to produce his hybrid content. In woodcuts, for example, he brought the rough carving he pioneered in his wood sculptures and reliefs together with a color application suggestive of painting; in his monotypes he combined watercolor painting with transfer printing; and in his transfer drawings he combined a quasi-painterly treatment of oil-based ink and a linear style of drawing. When we look at these extraordinary works on paper, the issue of process comes to the fore, as we cannot help but think about how they were made and about the unusualness of Gauguin's approach. Technique is an integral aspect of content throughout Gauguin's work, but especially in his prints, monotypes, and transfer drawings.

• The Volpini Suite (1889) •

As mentioned above, Gauguin made his first prints, the *Volpini Suite* zincographs, in 1889.¹⁶ He was forty-one years old at the time, and had only just reached stylistic maturity. He had become an artist in the 1870s when Impressionist artists were ascendant, and he exhibited alongside them into the following decade. But by 1887, he had rejected the Impressionists' emphasis on the visual effects of light on objects and began to align himself with the nascent Symbolist movement, which prioritized inner feelings and oblique evocations over outward appearances and factual details. Instead of working en plein air to transcribe outdoor scenes directly in front of him, Gauguin now began referring to sketches and studies of nature as well as to other sources, including the works of old masters, and then using his imagination to stitch them together to create new works. Working in the Breton village of Pont-Aven for most of 1888 (including a few fruitful months alongside painter Émile Bernard), he devised a new style of painting, epitomized in *La Vision du sermon*

(*The Vision after the Sermon*, 1888; p. 54, fig. 4), which centers on clearly outlined areas of unmodulated color and is infused with an oblique personal and spiritual symbolism.

At this major turning point, Gauguin was encouraged by his new dealer, Theo van Gogh, brother of Vincent, to make a series of lithographs. The dealer was looking for a way to promote the radical direction of the emerging artists he was representing, and Paris was in thrall to printmaking. Gauguin, always seeking recognition, was happy to try his hand at lithography, which was beginning to flower artistically as it shed the commercial associations that had plagued it since its invention earlier in the century. He wrote to Vincent van Gogh around January 1889: "I have begun a series of lithographs to be published in order to make myself known."¹⁷ The series came to be known as the *Volpini Suite*, as it was available for viewing, on request, at an exhibition arranged by Gauguin, Bernard, and others in their circle at the Café Volpini, just outside the grounds of the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris. (Although the establishment was known as the Café Volpini — in reference to its owner — its proper name was Café des Arts.) The artists staged the show in response to their exclusion from the Universal Exhibition itself.¹⁸

Although the prints were his first efforts in a new medium, Gauguin boldly made several provocative and unorthodox choices for them. He created his compositions not on the limestone slabs traditionally used in lithography but on zinc plates, which at the time were considered a more commercial matrix (though Bernard had already used them in his own lithographs). He also had the compositions printed (mostly in black ink, though one was in brown) on large sheets of vibrant yellow paper of the sort that commercial artists might have used for posters.¹⁹ He left unusually wide margins around the printed images, so that the almost garish yellow of the paper dominates. This simple method of incorporating vivid color into monochromatic compositions foreshadowed his much more elaborate experiments with color printing in later print series.

Eight of the eleven *Volpini* compositions reinterpret paintings and ceramics inspired by Gauguin's recent trips to Pont-Aven, Arles, and Martinique, while the other three

stand as independent images. The ceramics were part of an extended series of small works that he had created in ceramist Ernest Chaplet's studios in Paris between 1886 and 1888.²⁰ The approximately one hundred experimental ceramic pieces he likely made (of which only about sixty have been documented) mark another occasion on which Gauguin threw himself into an unfamiliar medium with alacrity.²¹ He hoped at first that the ceramics would prove lucrative, but within a few months he knew his unconventional approach would not be commercially popular. By then, however, he was given over to the process and sought nothing less than to reinvent the medium. As he later wrote, "My goal was to transform the eternal Greek vase, . . . to replace the potter at his wheel by intelligent hands which could impart the life of a face to a vase and yet remain true to the character of the material used."²²

Disregarding ceramic convention, which privileged symmetrical, cylindrical vases turned on potters' wheels, Gauguin treated the clay like a sculpting material, kneading it with his hands to form unusual and sometimes fantastical figurative shapes. Many of his ceramics transposed motifs from his paintings and some were based on his drawings; others were completely new inventions. These objects, which he called the products of his "hautes folies,"²³ were partly inspired by pre-Columbian pottery, especially that of Peru.²⁴ Gauguin's sculptural creativity can be seen, for example, in his exaggerated, butterfly-wing-like version of the traditional Breton headwear in *Vessel in the Form of the Head of a Breton Girl* (1886–87; pl. 13). Traditional clothing is also featured in *Vase Decorated with Breton Scenes* (1886–87; pl. 11), the figures of which are based on a contemporaneous painting by him.²⁵ But in this case the sensitive use of glazing lends the work a painterly aspect.²⁶ The economy of these early ceramics, along with compositional choices that arose from technical considerations of the medium (such as using incised outlines to prevent the mixing of colors during the firing process), soon led Gauguin to simplify his motifs and adopt a more stylized approach in his painting, as seen in *Breton Girls Dancing, Pont-Aven* (1888; pl. 8). In the related *Volpini Suite* zincograph (pl. 9), he simplified and abstracted the figures

even further as he translated them into stark black lines and washes. Thus, with such works, Gauguin transported motifs back and forth between two and three dimensions, each time recropping or reconceiving them to focus the viewer's attention in a new way. In these instances, the individual works become players in a larger story about Gauguin's enduring fascination with a particular subject and about how he expressed that fascination through a range of intriguing techniques.

• The Noa Noa Suite (1893–94) •

Despite their daring and unusual aspects, Gauguin's *Volpini* zincographs still operated within the realm of conventional printmaking, in the sense that they were published in an edition of around thirty and printed by an established printer,²⁷ who worked to ensure uniformity across all impressions in the edition. Although Gauguin made a few more zincographs and a lithograph (see, for example, pls. 70, 114), zincography and lithography were not mediums that he felt compelled to investigate much further (and after he moved permanently to the South Pacific in 1895, he would not have had the opportunity to do so in any event). He made an etching in 1891: a portrait of his friend and supporter, the great Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé (fig. 3), in which a raven is shown hovering over Mallarmé's head as an homage to his 1874 French translation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven." But it was woodcut that became a recurring preoccupation of Gauguin's; he picked up the medium in 1893, precipitating a decade of unbridled experimentation in printing and transfer processes.

Gauguin's first woodcuts were the ten prints of the incomparable *Noa Noa* suite (fig. 4), in which he essentially reinvented the medium and ushered it into the modern era.²⁸ The artist began the *Noa Noa* woodcuts in late 1893, four years after completing the *Volpini Suite*. Much had transpired during those years. At the end of August 1893, Gauguin had returned to Paris after having spent two years in Tahiti (his first sojourn there). He was disappointed that the island was already far from the unspoiled Eden he had imagined it would be, but he was eager to generate interest in the Tahitian-themed paintings and sculptures he had brought



fig. 3
Portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé. 1891. Etching and drypoint, plate 7³/₁₆ × 5¹¹/₁₆" (18.3 × 14.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously

back with him and to reclaim a leadership position within the avant-garde. Using funds from a recent inheritance, he rented space at dealer Paul Durand-Ruel's gallery to exhibit the Tahitian works in November 1893. He also began working on a text that would describe his Tahitian experience (in fanciful, Symbolist terms) and highlight the significance of the paintings and sculptures he had created there, in which he fabricated an idealized picture of precolonial Tahitian life and culture. But the Durand-Ruel exhibition was not a success, with only a few positive reviews and only eleven of the fifty paintings being sold, leaving Gauguin's reputation as well as the market and prices for his work to plummet.²⁹

He decided to try to use the text, which he had not managed to finish in time for the exhibition, to mitigate these disastrous results by explaining his Tahitian project so that the work would be more accessible to Parisian audiences. It would be accompanied by a suite of ten woodcuts that would take subjects from key paintings and sculptures that he had made in Tahiti in the years before and translate them into a more "primitive" visual language. Gauguin enlisted the help of poet, critic, and Symbolism advocate Charles Morice to make additions and edits to his text; although the two worked for the next several years on the publication, titled *Noa Noa*, which translates to "fragrant scent,"³⁰ it was never issued as originally intended.³¹ The woodcuts did materialize, however; Gauguin was consumed with working on them from December 1893 through March 1894. Most of the *Noa Noa* woodcuts are directly related to paintings, although they substantially revise the original compositions. As in the *Volpini* prints, the subjects are cropped or reoriented for their printed versions, and compositional elements are added, cut, or shifted. When considered together, the ten woodcuts speak to a grand life cycle encompassing primordial origins, everyday life, love, fear, religion, and death. Various scholars have proposed different ways of ordering the prints to emphasize particular narratives, but it is not clear whether the artist had any particular sequence in mind.³²

As is frequently noted, Gauguin likely chose the medium of woodcut because of its historical connections to book illustration, its use in "primitive" printmaking by



fig. 4

Impressions of the ten woodcuts comprising the suite *Noa Noa* (*Fragrant Scent*), 1893–94. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: *Noa Noa* (pl. 25); *Nave nave fenua* (*Delightful Land*) (pl. 57); *Te faruru* (*Here We Make Love*) (pl. 38); *Te po* (*Eternal Night*) (pl. 68); *Manao tupapau* (*Watched by the Spirit of the Dead*) (pl. 74); *Mahna no varua ino* (*The Devil Speaks*) (pl. 43); *L'Univers est créé* (*The Creation of the Universe*) (pl. 47). This page, from top to bottom: *Auti te pape* (*Women at the River*) (pl. 31); *Maruru* (*Offerings of Gratitude*) (pl. 92); *Te atua* (*The Gods*) (pl. 86)

medieval artisans, and its popular role in Japanese culture and in French folk-art traditions. More important, however, is that woodcut was a natural extension of Gauguin's predilection for carving wood reliefs and sculptures. He had started making such works as early as 1880, and by 1890, when he wrote of "relaxing by doing wood carving and still life studies,"³³ carving had become more than a diversion and was now a primary means for him to forge a new primitive aesthetic. His ambitions in the medium were announced in the large-scale painted wood reliefs *Soyez amoureuses vous serez heureuses* (*Be in Love and You Will Be Happy*; pl. 135) and *Soyez mystérieuses* (*Be Mysterious*; pl. 32), created in Pont-Aven in 1889 and 1890, respectively. These were followed by the totemlike *ti'i'i* sculptures he created in Tahiti in 1892–93 (see, for example, pls. 20, 80, 81, 84, 85), which he prized for their "ultra-savage" quality.³⁴

As Richard S. Field first discovered, Gauguin seems to have worked on the ten *Noa Noa* blocks simultaneously, and in stages that encompass various highly unorthodox experiments in carving, inking, and printing.³⁵ He worked each print through several of these stages, printing a few impressions at each state along the way.³⁶ Instead of incising his wood engraving blocks with an eye toward making legible, detailed illustrations, as would have commonly been done, he used a combination of traditional and nontraditional tools to chisel the blocks in a manner similar to his methods for wood sculpture; then with a knife, a needle, and sandpaper incised fine lines that would produce detail and tonality in the prints; and finally utilized a woodcut gouge to clarify the carved compositions further.³⁷ Thus, the artist combined the coarser gouging of sculpture and woodcut (a medium that had flourished in the Renaissance but by Gauguin's time was considered all but obsolete) with the delicate detailing of wood engraving (a technique that was more commonly used by illustrators of books and journals than by fine artists). In one sense, his carving was related to the techniques he had used in sculptural reliefs such as *Soyez mystérieuses*; at the same time, the combination of broad, roughly defined areas with inner forms that are more intricately detailed also parallels an aspect of Gauguin's painting, whereby flat decorative



planes are tempered with patches of painterly color, as in *Fatata te miti* (*By the Sea*, 1892; fig. 5).

It was not only in carving but also in inking and printing that Gauguin took liberties with printmaking tradition. After pulling trial proofs of his blocks in a single color, usually black, and sometimes on pink paper, he experimented with a range of unusual and often destabilizing effects in the inking and printing of each impression, such that no two prints from the same block are quite the same and his already rather esoteric subjects become even more mysterious.

Apparently unable to create a standard edition himself, Gauguin finally asked his friend, painter Louis Roy, who had recently sat for a portrait painting (fig. 6), to produce an edition of twenty-five to thirty impressions from each block. The subtlety of Gauguin's method is especially noticeable when comparing the impressions that he pulled himself

with those of Roy, who printed the compositions in a more traditional fashion by applying the colors in a uniformly dense and flat manner, prioritizing rhythmic surface patterns over evanescent atmosphere.³⁸ Gauguin is thought to have been dissatisfied with the results.

The originality of the *Noa Noa* woodcuts and their extraordinary combination of painterly and sculptural effects were recognized by critics when Gauguin—out of dissatisfaction with the Durand-Ruel show—staged an exhibition in his studio on rue Vercingétorix in December 1894. In addition to paintings and sculptures, the show included Japanese prints, ethnographic objects, and travel souvenirs. Various impressions of the *Noa Noa* prints were also tacked onto shockingly bright yellow walls; additional impressions were passed around by hand. The poet and critic Julien Leclercq wrote: “His woodcuts, partaking of the style already apparent

in his reliefs, reveal a very personal harmony between sculpture and painting. . . . Imagine very low reliefs, rich in design, printed with a thick ink, and, in order to relieve the monotony of black and white, punctuated with a sober accent of red or yellow.”³⁹ As Leclercq and other critics realized, the audacity of Gauguin's woodcut process was unprecedented, even among the avant-garde artists, including Bernard, who were responsible for the woodcut revival happening at the time.⁴⁰

Through his innovations, Gauguin found a way to imbue the traditionally blunt medium of woodcut with the evocative dualities that were at the heart of his Symbolist aesthetic. His woodcut images convey, all at once, boldness and subtlety, image and abstraction, reality and dream. He was exploring the expressive potential of the medium as completely new and virgin territory. In viewing the sequence of progressive states for *Nave nave fenua*, it is as if we are watching the artist unearth a lost relic from an ancient time, as the image seems slowly to emerge from the background. For the first state, on pink paper (pl. 53), Gauguin had not yet finished carving the block, and he printed the composition lightly and unevenly, such that it appears as if in the midst of being excavated. In the second state (pl. 54), the image emerges more or less fully formed but is still shrouded in a cloak of black. In the third state (pl. 55), a few more details have been extracted. And in the fourth state (pls. 56, 57), Gauguin's additions of radiant gold and orange accents seem almost to suggest that dawn has finally broken and the image is now gloriously visible. In this gradual metamorphosis, there is a sense of a desire to bring something long hidden or buried back to light.

Indeed, as Alastair Wright has provocatively argued, Gauguin's obsessive repetitions, in impression after slightly varied impression, suggest an extended meditation on an untenable ideal, a sense that he is working to prevent his Tahitian dream from falling away.⁴¹ That the *Noa Noa* woodcuts are reimaginings of certain of Gauguin's Tahitian paintings—that they are, in a sense, one step removed from the paintings and created at a temporal and geographical distance from them—parallels a more foundational disconnect in his work, arising from the fact that his “only means of access to what



fig. 5
Fatata te miti (*By the Sea*), 1892. Oil on canvas, 26¾ × 36" (67.9 × 91.5 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Chester Dale Collection

fig. 6
Portrait of Louis Roy, 1893 or earlier. Oil on canvas, 16 × 13" (40.7 × 33 cm). Private collection, New York

he feared was a vanished Tahiti was via images and texts from other men's hands."⁴² Through his unorthodox methods of carving, inking, and printing, Gauguin was able to produce works that are darker, denser, more powerfully "primitive" and mysterious than the paintings they interpret. In many works, the pervasive black evokes a nighttime world rife with fear and superstition. Gauguin's obfuscatory printing further heightens the sense of unknown dangers. The orange light that radiates out from some of the prints suggests a primordial fire, as if Gauguin were trying to preserve the smoldering embers of Tahitian culture before they were completely extinguished. As he wrote: "The dream which had brought me to Tahiti was brutally disappointed by the actuality. It was the Tahiti of former times that I loved. . . . But how was I, all by myself, to find the traces of this past if any such traces remained? . . . How to relight the fire the very ashes of which are scattered?"⁴³

• **Watercolor Monotypes (1894)** •

Shortly after, or in some cases perhaps around the same time that, he was creating the *Noa Noa* woodcuts, Gauguin made several individual woodcuts and another body of unusual printed works—the watercolor monotypes of 1894.⁴⁴ Exactly when and how Gauguin made these monotypes is unknown. However, Peter Kort Zegers suggests that the artist created at least some of them alongside the *Noa Noa* woodcuts.⁴⁵ Others were made after he finished the *Noa Noa* suite and left Paris again for Brittany in the spring of 1894 (when a fractured leg, the result of a fight with a group of sailors, left him temporarily unable to paint). Of the approximately thirty-four known surviving examples,⁴⁶ some are closely related to his paintings, sculptures, or woodcuts, and others are more like independent studies or sketches. Although he seems to have worked in a concerted fashion on this body of monotypes in 1894, there is no narrative sequence or structure to them.

Combining aspects of prints and drawings, monotypes were traditionally made by rendering an image in oil- or water-based paint on a piece of metal (such as an etching plate) or glass; a sheet of paper would then be placed on top of the painted image and either the back would be manually rubbed or the sheet and matrix would be pressed together in a

printing press. Although there were some notable precedents, the technique was brought most strongly to life in the late nineteenth century, when its greatest practitioner was Edgar Degas.⁴⁷ Although Gauguin was influenced by Degas in many ways, there is no evidence that he knew of Degas's monotypes, which Degas treated as private studies. Gauguin seems to have devised on his own his manner of making monotypes.

Although his methods in creating these unconventional works are not entirely known, it is thought that his experiments in inking and printing the *Noa Noa* woodcuts may have led him to experiment with the transfer technique. Field proposed that each of Gauguin's watercolor monotypes is essentially a counterproof of one of his watercolor, gouache, or pastel drawings—a simple transfer carried out by pressing a damp sheet of paper to the drawing.⁴⁸ More recently, Zegers has found evidence that at least some of Gauguin's monotypes were made by placing a piece of glass over one of his existing drawings or watercolors; painting on top of the glass in watercolor or gouache, using the image below as a guide; and, finally, pulling an impression on dampened paper.⁴⁹ It is also possible that the artist employed both of these methods, in alternate fashion.⁵⁰ Among the few surviving drawings that he may have used in one of these ways is *Tahitian Girl in a Pink Pareu* (pl. 111), which served as the matrix for at least three known monotypes: two are reproduced in this book (pls. 112, 113) and a third is in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. As with all of his printmaking and transfer drawing techniques from this point forward, Gauguin's monotype process did not require any elaborate equipment, such as a printing press, or the help of skilled printers or technicians. Even so, he seems to have made monotypes very infrequently after 1894, creating just a handful more between about 1896 and 1902 (including those shown in pls. 172, 174, 179, 185).⁵¹

Zegers suggests not only that some of the monotypes may have been created alongside the *Noa Noa* suite but also that some may have helped Gauguin develop imagery for the woodcuts. One such monotype relates to the painting *Aha oe feii (What! Are You Jealous?)*, 1892; fig. 7). In the monotype (fig. 8), Gauguin copied the pairing of two figures—one seated and one reclining—from the painting, although their



fig. 7
Aha oe feii (What! Are You Jealous?). 1892. Oil on canvas,
26¹/₁₆ × 35³/₁₆" (66.2 × 89.3 cm). The Pushkin State
Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow

orientation of course reversed during the transfer process.

In a related *Noa Noa* woodcut, *Auti te pape* (*Women at the River*; fig. 9, pls. 31, 33, 34), the reclining figure is absent; however, corresponding to the position of its head is a small, rocklike form to the left of the remaining, seated figure. As the dimensions of various elements in the works are exactly the same, it is possible that Gauguin made his monotype first, transferred its outlines to the surface of his woodblock (pl. 30), and then, when he cut the block, eliminated the reclining figure and transformed its head into the rock shape.⁵²

These novel experiments mark yet another occasion on which Gauguin relied on his own creativity to produce a new and distinctly ethereal aesthetic. The monotypes, in their evanescence and often small, fragmentary quality, convey his nostalgia for a lost, impermanent, or impenetrable world even more poignantly than his woodcuts do. When compared with related paintings, sculptures, and even woodcuts, they suggest ghostly afterimages, faded mementos, or beautiful scenes viewed through the watery veil of memory.

• The Vollard Suite (1898–99) •

After his immersive efforts in woodcut and watercolor monotype in 1893–94, Gauguin made only a small number of woodcuts and a few monotypes before 1898,⁵³ when he plunged back into printed art with intense concentration. He had returned to Tahiti for the second time in 1895, following two mostly disappointing years in France, with meager sales, a diminished reputation, strained relations with his wife and family, and the onset of a series of illnesses contributing to his decision to depart Europe for good.

Just prior to leaving France, Gauguin had begun a tentative business relationship with Ambroise Vollard, an ambitious young dealer (who would go on to be one of the most important forces shaping the history of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century art). While in Tahiti the second time (and later in the Marquesas Islands), he maintained a prickly correspondence with Vollard, as each man sought an advantage over the other in selling Gauguin's art.⁵⁴ In April 1897, Gauguin sent Vollard a diffident letter indicating that

he was interested in making woodcuts but would not be conforming to Vollard's taste for polished, easily marketable works: "I neither search for nor find technical perfection. (There is no scarcity in makers of conventional lithographs.) Thus, if you feel like it, send me paper and money."⁵⁵ In 1898–99 he created fourteen new woodcuts, all of which he printed himself on tissue-thin sheets of Japanese paper. In January 1900, he wrote again to Vollard: "Next month I am sending . . . about 475 wood engravings—25 to 30 numbered prints have been made from each block, and the blocks then destroyed. Half of the blocks have been used twice, and I am the only person who can make prints that way."⁵⁶ The series has become known as the *Vollard Suite*, since, in February 1900, Gauguin sent the entire edition to Vollard in hopes that the dealer would sell the prints advantageously.⁵⁷ Gauguin seems to have used mostly found pieces of wood for his printing blocks, and his statement that the blocks were destroyed is not entirely true.⁵⁸ One of the extant blocks, for a work titled *L'Enlèvement d'Europe* (*The Rape of Europa*; pl. 131), was fashioned from a beautiful but irregular hunk of indigenous wood (pl. 130). Pulling each of the 475 impressions himself and signing and numbering them was a monumental feat that speaks to how significant Gauguin felt this project was. (He had at least forty-five woodcuts from the suite pasted to the walls of his residence on Hiva Oa when he died.) Vollard, though, was apparently unimpressed by the prints, and made no effort to sell them.

Most of the prints reprise figures and themes that he had already explored in paintings and sculptures made in Brittany, Arles, and Tahiti (both during his first trip to the island and during his previous three years there)—the suite serving as a retrospective presentation of his entire career and the third and final example, following the *Volpini* and *Noa Noa* suites, of his use of a print series in a summative manner. *Misères humaines* (*Human Misery*, pl. 125) revisits a motif—that of a distressed female sitting with her hands under her chin—shown in earlier works, including a zincograph in the *Volpini Suite* (pl. 7) and a painting from 1888.⁵⁹ (In addition, the figure of a female suffering in all three of them is derived from a Peruvian mummy that Gauguin had seen in an ethnographic

museum in Paris). All but four of the fourteen woodcut compositions are horizontal in format, and, as Richard Brettell first proposed, certain of the sheets can be laid one to the next in frieze-type arrangements that echo the formats of several major paintings and sculptures that Gauguin was creating during this period.⁶⁰ These major works include his magnum opus, *D'où venons nous? Que sommes nous? Où allons nous?* (*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897–98; p. 52, fig. 2), completed the same year he began the prints, as well as the aforementioned *Faa iheihe* (pl. 117) and even the five wood panels he carved in 1901–02 to frame the doorway of his house, the *Maison du Jouis* (*House of Pleasure*), on the island of Hiva Oa (p. 45, fig. 8). Motifs from one of the *Vollard Suite* woodcuts, *Soyez amoureuses vous serez heureuses* (pl. 137), look back to the 1889 carved wood relief of the same title (pl. 135) while at the same time anticipating a number of details that Gauguin included in two of the *Maison du Jouis* panels.

Although there is no fixed order or sequential narrative for the *Vollard Suite* woodcuts, Gauguin clearly conceived them as a series, with the stark, rhythmic black and white that dominates them imposing a unifying aesthetic. He may have intended the prints to be similar to a set of myriorama cards, a popular children's entertainment in nineteenth-century Europe involving illustrated cards that could be laid out in any order to create multiple panoramic landscapes.⁶¹ Gauguin's prints seem to invite the viewer to participate in an activity of arranging and rearranging similar to the artist's own process of repurposing images and motifs. Such combining and recombining is related to the Symbolist tendency to fuse disparate elements, a pre-Freudian game of free association that Gauguin called "dreaming."

While eleven of the *Vollard Suite* woodcuts are rendered in black and white, in three of them (pls. 133, 136, 137) Gauguin devised an innovative way to incorporate a second color, extending the experiments with layering that he had begun in his *Noa Noa* prints. The image for each of these works was created in two states. To make *Te atua* (*The Gods*, pl. 133), for example, he printed numerous impressions of the first state in gray ink on tissue-thin paper. After this, he went back



fig. 8
Aha oe feii (*What! Are You Jealous?*). 1894. Watercolor monotype with pen and red and black ink, 7¹¹/₁₆ × 9¹/₈" (19.5 × 23.2 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of Edward McCormick Blair



fig. 9
Auti te pape (*Women at the River*), state II/II, from the suite *Noa Noa* (*Fragrant Scent*). 1893–94. Woodcut, comp. 8 × 14" (20.4 × 35.6 cm). Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Collections Jacques Doucet, Paris

to work on the woodblock, cutting out additional areas of the composition to develop a second state of the image, and then printed a set of prints of this state in black ink, again on tissue-thin paper. Finally, he pasted the prints of the second state (in black) on top of those of the first (in gray). Because of the transparency of the paper, both colors are visible in the superimposed versions, and together they produce a rich chiaroscuro effect. Gauguin's fascination with the potential of the transparent paper is further reflected in an unusual variant impression of *Te atua* (pl. 132). Here, he took one of the impressions of the second state (again, printed in black on tissue-thin paper) and mounted it face down on another, heavier paper; the image is completely visible through the thin paper, but because we are looking through the verso, it reads in reverse. In *Te atua* and the other two dichromatic Volland Suite woodcuts—which were printed in black and orange-brown (pl. 136, 137)—the layered diaphanous sheets give the compositions a veiled quality, comparable in its textural subtlety to the atmospheric inking in the *Noa Noa* prints, the transparent haze of the watercolor monotypes,



fig. 10

Change of Residence. 1901–02. Verso (left): graphite; recto (right): oil transfer drawing, sheet $5\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{3}{16}$ " (14×21.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Sue and Edgar Wachenheim III Endowment for Prints and Illustrated Books.

and the diffuse granularity of the oil transfer drawings that would be his next great innovation.

• **Oil Transfer Drawings (c. 1899–1903)** •

Only a few months after sending Vollard his edition of fourteen woodcuts, Gauguin shipped him a second package, containing ten more works on paper that represent another radical experiment: the oil transfer drawings. Gauguin's technique for these works served (like that for his watercolor monotypes) as a hybrid of drawing and printmaking, and it marked a grand culmination of his quest for an aesthetic of mystery, indeterminacy, and suggestion.⁶² From 1899 to 1903 (the year of his death), he was preoccupied with this new technique that he had devised wholly on his own.⁶³

It is likely that Gauguin's use of the Edison mimeograph (an early version of the Xerox machine) in publishing his satirical newspaper, *Le Sourire* (The smile; pls. 141–43), from August 1899 to April 1900 led him to develop this new medium. He described his process in a March 1902 letter to his patron Gustave Fayet: "First you roll out printer's ink



fig. 11

Change of Residence. c. 1902. Verso (top): graphite and red crayon; recto (bottom): oil transfer drawing, sheet $14\frac{1}{16} \times 21\frac{5}{16}$ " (37.9×54.9 cm). Galerie Berès, Paris

on a sheet of paper of any sort; then lay a second sheet on top of it and draw whatever pleases you. The harder and thinner your pencil (as well as your paper), the finer will be the resulting line."⁶⁴ The pressure from the artist's pencil caused the ink from the bottom sheet to adhere to the underside of the top sheet. When the top sheet was lifted away, the drawing had been transferred, in reverse, to its underside; this transferred image was the final work of art.⁶⁵

In developing this technique, Gauguin's progress from rather small and sketchlike monotypes, such as *Studies of a Torso and Two Hands* (c. 1899–1902; pl. 145), to the ambitiously large, highly finished sheets that he sent to Vollard (see, for example, pls. 154, 155, 156, 161, 171) was quite rapid. *Change of Residence* (1901–02; fig. 10, pl. 175), which reprises a Volland Suite woodcut (pl. 136), is one of the most straightforward examples of Gauguin's technique. The oil transfer on the recto is a mirror image of the basic pencil drawing on the verso. The lightly shaded areas in the clothing of some of the figures were probably achieved by applying gentle pressure, perhaps with a finger. In another, larger version of the same subject (fig. 11, pl. 176), Gauguin built up a layer of atmospheric texture; it seems that after creating the main transfer drawing in black, he placed the sheet with the drawing on top of a matrix covered with brown ink diluted with oil, and pressed the verso with his fingers or with a dry paintbrush. The earthy combination of black and brown in this and other transfer drawings appears throughout Gauguin's printed oeuvre, from the *Noa Noa* woodcuts to the Volland Suite. In the transfer drawings, with their diffuse and irregular textures, it promotes a timeless quality by suggesting connections to ancient rubbings, time-worn frescoes, or cave paintings.

Gauguin used two colors in his largest compositions, transferring the inks in separate stages and employing different tools to produce different types of marks. As seen on the versos of such works (see pls. 154, 155, 156, 161), he usually started with a thin graphite pencil to achieve the black lines that delineate the figures, and then used a softer blue crayon to reinforce his lines and add shading. As a final step, he transferred the second color, usually olive or brown, to certain areas of the compositions. However, it must be noted that



the more one searches for a system or rules as to how Gauguin created these unusual transfer drawings, the more apparent it becomes that his procedures varied from one work to the next, with each serving as a singular experiment with a new technique still revealing its possibilities to him.

While Gauguin often modeled his zincographs, woodcuts, and watercolor monotypes on extant paintings, it seems he sometimes created his transfer drawings in preparation for or in tandem with new paintings (although it is difficult to date the transfers precisely). It is conceivable that the process helped fuel his imagination as he developed a new subject or theme. Indeed, toward the end of his life the artist seems to have made fewer drawings in pastel and charcoal, and it may be that the transfer drawings assumed a more central place in his practice. The ten transfer drawings Gauguin sent to Vollard present, in magisterial and occasionally classicizing terms, some of the themes that were most important to him, including the mysterious beauty of the Tahitian woman, who is sometimes haunted by an evil or predatory spirit (pls. 154–56); Tahitians living in harmony with nature (pl. 161); and the Tahitian landscape (pl. 171).⁶⁶ As such, they were meant to showcase the best of his work in terms he hoped would be appealing to the French art market. Unfortunately, once again, Gauguin’s radicality failed to impress Vollard.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, Gauguin continued to make oil transfer drawings after he had moved to the island of Hiva Oa in the Marquesas Islands in September of 1901, ever in search of a more remote and unspoiled culture and seeking to escape the unpopularity he had gained in Tahiti due to his provocative lifestyle and caustic criticism of colonial and religious authorities. Among the most accomplished are a number of works that reprise the subjects of his recent paintings, cropping them or reorienting or repositioning certain motifs, as was his usual method (see, for example, the relationship between the painting *Two Women* [1902; pl. 167] and two of the oil transfer drawings known as *Two Marquesans* [both c. 1902; pls. 162, 165]).

Gauguin prized his oil transfer process for the way it transformed the quality of the drawn line. While the pencil

drawings he created on the versos are in many cases beautifully sensitive works in their own right, the artist made them with a view to producing the more indefinite images that would appear, through his almost alchemical transfer process, on the other sides of the sheets. He was fascinated by the element of chance involved in his process and by the unexpected marks and textures that arose in the transferred compositions. These effects tend to obfuscate the images, submerging them in a dark and diffuse atmosphere. In metamorphosing a drawing into a print, the act of creation was also an act of calculated destruction and deformation; legibility and illusionism were lost, and an aura of mystery and abstraction was gained. In their hybridism, the transfer drawings represent Gauguin’s final and perhaps most daring attempt to unify aspects of painting, drawing, and printmaking. And as the culminating invention of a decade of experimentation with various innovative print techniques, they confirm that for Gauguin it was the creative process itself—the process of taking one thing and working to transform it into something radically new—that mattered above all else.

NOTES

1 / The significance of writing to Gauguin’s practice cannot be explored here but is chronicled in Elizabeth C. Childs, “Gauguin as Author: Writing the Studio of the Tropics,” *Van Gogh Museum Journal*, 2003: 70–87.

2 / Seventy-nine lithographs, etchings, and woodcuts are documented in Elizabeth Mongan, Eberhard W. Kornfeld, and Harold Joachim, *Paul Gauguin: Catalogue Raisonné of His Prints* (Bern, Switzerland: Galerie Kornfeld, 1988).

3 / In *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), Richard S. Field identifies 139 monotypes and transfer drawings, acknowledging that more might still be located and that there are surely others that have not survived to the present. In the current exhibition and catalogue, we have borrowed the terms “watercolor monotype” and “gouache monotype” from Field. For the type of work we call “oil transfer drawing,” he used the term “traced monotype.”

4 / Richard S. Field, “Gauguin’s Noa Noa Suite,” *The Burlington Magazine* 110, no. 786 (September 1968): 509.

5 / Gauguin claimed to be descended from the Incas, saying, “You know I have an Indian background, an Inca background, and it affects everything I do. . . . I try to confront rotten civilization with something more natural, based in savagery.” Letter to Theo van Gogh, November 20 or 21, 1889, in Douglas Cooper, ed., *Paul Gauguin: 45 lettres à Vincent, Théo et Jo van Gogh* (The Hague, Netherlands: Staatsuitgeverij; Lausanne: Bibliothèque des Arts, 1983), pp. 166–69. Although he spent his early childhood in Peru, where his great-uncle had been the Spanish viceroy, his claim to a “savage” Incaic ancestry was a self-serving fabrication.

6 / For more on Gauguin’s self-mythology, see Belinda Thomson, ed., *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* (London: Tate, 2010), especially Thomson’s essay, “Paul Gauguin: Navigating the Myth,” pp. 10–23.

7 / For more on this, see Elizabeth C. Childs, “The Colonial Lens: Gauguin, Primitivism, and Photography in the Fin de siècle,” in Lynda Jessup, ed., *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 50–70.

8 / “Gauguin est fini pour ici, on ne verra plus rien de lui. Vous voyez que je suis égoïste. J’emporte en photographies, dessins, tout un petit monde de camarades que me causeront tous les jours.” Letter from Paul Gauguin to Odilon Redon, September, 1890, in Roseline Bacou and Ari Redon, eds., *Lettres de Gauguin, Gide, Huysmans, Jammes, Mallarmé, Verhaeren. . . à Odilon Redon* (Paris: José Corti, 1960), p. 193.

9 / Alastair Wright, “Paradise Lost: Gauguin and the Melancholy Logic of Reproduction,” in Wright and Calvin Brown, *Gauguin’s Paradise Remembered: The Noa Noa Prints* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Art Museum, 2010), p. 78.

10 / In a seminal article, Bernard Dorival identified the Borobudur photograph as well as several other ancient sources as the inspiration behind numerous motifs in Gauguin’s work. See Dorival, “Sources of the Art of Gauguin from Java, Egypt and Ancient Greece,” *Burlington Magazine* 93, no. 577 (April 1951): 118–22.

11 / Different scholars point to one or the other figure as the basis for the Tahitian Eve in *Nave nave fenua*. Indeed, Gauguin’s female figure combines aspects of both.

12 / Paper and reproductions of art were relatively precious prior to the nineteenth century, but in Gauguin’s era paper became less expensive, more varied, and more plentiful. And after the advent of photography in the early nineteenth century, reproduction technologies advanced to a degree that enabled, for the first time, books, magazines, posters, and postcards containing printed illustrations to flood European shops and streets. Gauguin responded to the phenomenon of “graphic traffic” more profoundly than any other artist of the time. See Richard R. Brettell, “Gauguin and Paper: Writing, Copying, Drawing, Painting, Pasting, Cutting, Wetting, Tracing, Inking, Printing,” in Stephen F. Eisenman, ed., *Paul Gauguin: Artist of Myth and Dream* (Milan: Skira; New York: Rizzoli International, 2007), pp. 59–60.

13 / *Ibid.*, p. 65.

14 / *Ibid.*, p. 67.

15 / *Paul Gauguin’s Intimate Journals*, trans. Van Wyck Brooks (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), p. 75. This book is an English translation of Gauguin’s *Avant et après* (Before and after, 1903) and was originally published in 1921 (New York: Boni and Liveright).

16 / For the *Volpini Suite*, see pls. 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14–17.

17 / “J’ai commencé une série de lithographies pour être publiées afin de me faire connaître.” Letter from Paul Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh, January 1889, quoted in Mongan, Kornfeld, and Joachim, *Paul Gauguin*, p. 11.

18 / For a thorough study of the *Volpini Suite*, see Heather Lemonedes, Belinda Thomson, and Agnieszka Juszcak, *Paul Gauguin: The Breakthrough into Modernity* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009).

19 / Other reasons Gauguin might have chosen the yellow paper, such as the newfound popularity of yellow within the avant-garde and the color’s association with Japanese art and with the art of Vincent van Gogh, are detailed in Heather Lemonedes, “Gauguin Becomes a Printmaker,” in *ibid.*, pp. 112–17.

20 / Gauguin was introduced to Chaplet by Félix Bracquemond, a painter and etcher and the artistic director of Charles Haviland’s ceramic workshop in Auteuil. Impressed by one of the wood reliefs, *La Toilette* (1882), that Gauguin exhibited in 1886 at the eighth and final Impressionist exhibition, Bracquemond encouraged the artist to make ceramics.

21 / Most of Gauguin’s known ceramics are documented in Merete Bodelsen, *Gauguin’s Ceramics: A Study in the Development of His Art* (London: Faber and Faber; in association with Copenhagen: Nordisk Sprog-og Kulturforlag, 1964); and Christopher Gray, *Sculpture and Ceramics of Paul Gauguin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963). Another useful text is Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Gauguin Ceramics*, trans. Dan A. Marmorstein (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1996).

22 / Paul Gauguin, in *Le Soir*, April 25, 1895, in Daniel Guérin, ed., *The Writings of a Savage*, trans. Eleanor Levieux (New York: Viking Press, 1978), p. 106.

23 / Letter to Félix Bracquemond, late 1886 or early 1887, in Victor Merlhès, ed., *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: Documents, témoignages*. (Paris: Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1984), p. 143.

24 / When Gauguin’s mother left Peru with Gauguin (age six) and his sister, Marie, to return to France, she brought back a collection of Peruvian artifacts that made a lasting impression on him. For more on the inspiration the artist derived from Peruvian pottery, see Barbara Braun, “Paul Gauguin’s Indian Identity: How Ancient Peruvian Pottery Inspired His Art,” *Art History* 9, no. 1 (March 1986): 36–54.

25 / The painting is *Four Breton Women* (1886), in the collection of the Neue Pinakothek in Munich. See Georges Wildenstein, *Gauguin* (Paris: Beaux-Arts, 1964), cat. no. 201.

26 / Most of Gauguin’s ceramics were modeled by the artist himself, but *Vase Decorated with Breton Scenes* was thrown on the wheel by Chaplet, with the glaze added afterward by Gauguin.

27 / Edward Ancourt is named as the *Volpini Suite*’s printer in Mongan, Kornfeld, and Joachim, *Paul Gauguin*, p. 11. Heather Lemonedes, however, has suggested that the printer was not Ancourt, but rather an “imprimeur lithograph” named Labbé. See Lemonedes, “Gauguin Becomes a Printmaker,” p. 98.

28 / For *Noa Noa*, in addition to fig. 4, see pls. 23–26, 31, 33, 34, 36–39, 41–44, 46, 47, 49, 53–58, 66–69, 72–75, 82, 83, 86, 87, 91, 92, 94.

29 / For more on the Durand-Ruel exhibition and its significance for Gauguin, see Claire Frèches-Thory, “The Exhibition at Durand-Ruel,” in George T. M. Shackelford and Frèches-Thory, eds., *Gauguin Tahiti* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2004), pp. 83–90.

30 / Gauguin’s letters and journal entries concerning Tahiti include many references to the unique and intoxicating smells of the island’s trees, wood, flowers, soil, and people. For him, the *Noa Noa* title had a distinctly sexual connotation, referring to the natural fragrance of the Tahitian body. In his first draft of the *Noa Noa* manuscript, he wrote of his early encounters with his teenage mistress Tehamana, who “opens up more and more, docile, loving: the Tahitian *noa noa* makes everything fragrant” (Guérin, *Writings*, p. 94).

31 / For more on the *Noa Noa* manuscript, including its various stages and versions and its complicated publication history, see Isabelle Cahn, “*Noa Noa*: The Voyage to Tahiti,” in Shackelford and Frèches-Thory, *Gauguin Tahiti*, pp. 91–13. Three versions of the manuscript were written. The first is an unillustrated manuscript in Gauguin’s hand and was probably begun in October 1893; it is now in the collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu. Gauguin worked on the second, the collaboration with Charles Morice, between 1893 and 1897, and it is copiously illustrated with drawings, watercolors, collaged photographs, monotypes, and fragments of Gauguin’s *Noa Noa* woodcuts; it is preserved at the Louvre in Paris. The third manuscript is dated 1897 and is in Morice’s hand; it is in the Morice Archives of the Paley Library at Temple University in Philadelphia.

32 / Richard S. Field, in his groundbreaking study “Gauguin’s *Noa Noa Suite*” (see note 5 above), argues that the prints detail “a deliberate life cycle,” beginning with *Te atua* (*The Gods*; pls. 82, 83, 86, 87). Other scholars, starting with Marcel Guérin in 1927, have offered various other specific sequences. Most recently, Calvin Brown has suggested a sequence based on the ten chapters of the first *Noa Noa* manuscript. See Brown, “Paradise Remembered: The *Noa Noa* Woodcuts,” in Wright and Brown, *Gauguin’s Paradise Remembered*, pp. 109–10.

33 / Letter to Émile Bernard, in Maurice Malingue, ed., *Paul Gauguin: Letters to His Wife and Friends*, trans. Henry J. Stenning (London: Saturn Press, 1949), p. 144. The letter is dated in the book as June 1890, but various topics that Gauguin discusses in it (such as the “howling wind” and the public’s campaign to acquire Manet’s painting *Olympia* for the state) suggest that it is more likely from November or December 1889. I thank Belinda Thomson for pointing this out.

34 / Letter, April–May (?) 1893, in Anne Joly-Segalen, ed., *Lettres de Gauguin à Daniel de Monfreid* (Paris: Georges Falaize, 1950), p. 70.

35 / See Field, “Gauguin’s *Noa Noa Suite*,” p. 503.

36 / Many of the impressions are described in Mongan, Kornfeld, and Joachim, *Paul Gauguin*, cat. nos. 13–22.

37 / For more on Gauguin’s technique in the *Noa Noa* prints, see Erika Mosier’s essay in this volume, pp. 61–65.

38 / For examples of Roy’s prints, see pls. 26, 34, 39, 44, 49, 58, 69, 75, 87, 94.

39 / Julien Leclercq, “Exposition Paul Gauguin,” *Mercure de France* 13 (February 1895): 121–22, quoted in Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, p. 16. The critic Charles Morice (Gauguin’s partner on the *Noa Noa* manuscript) wrote: “From the standpoint of technique . . . I would say that what Gauguin is attempting to do today will bring about nothing less than a revolution tomorrow in the arts of printmaking and watercolor; that through the disciplined exercise of his tireless penchant to invent—or to rediscover if you prefer to think of it that way—he has taken these two arts, degraded by their acknowledged ‘masters,’ back to their fertile origins; that in this matter then, as in so many others, it is by him that the aesthetic moment of our time will remain marked” (Charles Morice, “L’Atelier de Paul Gauguin,” *Le Soir*, December 4, 1894: 2, quoted in Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, p. 48n11).

40 / For an in-depth study of the French woodcut revival, see Jacquelynn Baas and Richard S. Field, *The Artistic Revival of the Woodcut in France, 1850–1900* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 1984).

41 / Wright, “Paradise Lost.”

42 / *Ibid.*, p. 90.

43 / Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa* (New York: Dover, 1985), p. 7.

44 / For the individual woodcuts, see pls. 64, 76, 77, 96, 97, 101–05, 109, 110; and for the watercolor monotypes, see pls. 19, 27, 28, 60, 62, 78, 100, 107, 112, 113, 115, 116, 138, 139.

45 / Peter Kort Zegers, “In the Kitchen with Paul Gauguin: Devising Recipes for a Symbolist Graphic Aesthetic,” in Harriet K. Stratis and Britt Salvesen, eds., *The Broad Spectrum: Studies in the Materials, Techniques, and Conservation of Color on Paper* (London: Archetype Publications Ltd., 2002), p. 140.

46 / These thirty-four are documented in Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, cat. nos. 1–34.

47 / For an excellent overview and history of the monotype, see *The Painterly Print: Monotypes from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980). See also the discussion in Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, pp. 13–15.

48 / Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, p. 17.

49 / Zegers, “In the Kitchen with Paul Gauguin,” p. 143.

50 / Julien Leclercq wrote that Gauguin’s watercolor monotypes were made through “a process of printing with water” (quoted in *ibid.*). This seems to be the only description of the technique written during Gauguin’s lifetime.

51 / “A tentative group of sixteen works”—nine watercolor monotypes from around 1896–99 and seven gouache monotypes created around 1902—are identified in Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*. See the discussion on pp. 38–39 and cat. nos. 124–39.

52 / Zegers, “In the Kitchen with Paul Gauguin,” p. 140.

53 / For the woodcuts, see Mongan, Kornfeld, and Joachim, *Paul Gauguin*, cat. nos. 36–40; and for the monotypes, see Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, cat. nos. 124–31.

54 / For an excellent essay on the troubled, complicated relationship between Vollard and Gauguin, see Douglas Druick, “Vollard and Gauguin: Fictions and Facts,” in Rebecca Rabinow, ed., *Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), pp. 60–81.

55 / Letter from Paul Gauguin to Ambroise Vollard, April 1897, quoted in John Rewald, “The Genius and the Dealer,” *Art News* (May 1959): 62.

56 / Letter from Paul Gauguin to Ambroise Vollard, January 1900, in John Rewald, ed., *Letters to Ambroise Vollard & André Fontainas*, trans. G. Mack (San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1943), p. 31.

57 / For the *Vollard Suite*, see pls. 118–21, 123–25, 127–29, 131–33, 136, 137.

58 / Three of the woodblocks for the *Vollard Suite* are in the collection of the National Gallery in Prague. For a fascinating history of how these blocks were discovered (and why their condition has deteriorated), see Libuse Sykorová, *Gauguin Woodcuts* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1963). Four other blocks and fragments of blocks by Gauguin, including several carved as headpieces for *Le Sourire* (The smile), the satirical newspaper that Gauguin published in 1899–1900, are also preserved at Prague’s National Gallery, along with four small wood reliefs that cannot be attributed to Gauguin with any certainty. The Prague blocks, fragments, and carvings are noted in Mongan, Kornfeld, and Joachim, *Paul Gauguin*, cat. nos. 15, 43, 44, 55, 62, 63, 66, 67, and Supplement B.VI–IX.

59 / For this painting, *Misères humaines*, see Wildenstein, *Gauguin*, cat. no. 304.

60 / Richard Brettell, “232–245: Suite of Late Woodcuts, 1898–1899,” in Brettell, Françoise Cachin, Claire Frèches-Thory, and Charles F. Stuckey, *The Art of Paul Gauguin* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1988), pp. 428–36.

61 / Elizabeth Prelinger suggests this in “The ‘Vollard Suite.’” in Tobia Bezzola and Prelinger, *Paul Gauguin: The Prints* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2012), p. 104.

62 / Examples of artists making works in this fashion prior to Gauguin are not known. In the twentieth century, artists including Paul Klee and Mira Schendel devised comparable techniques.

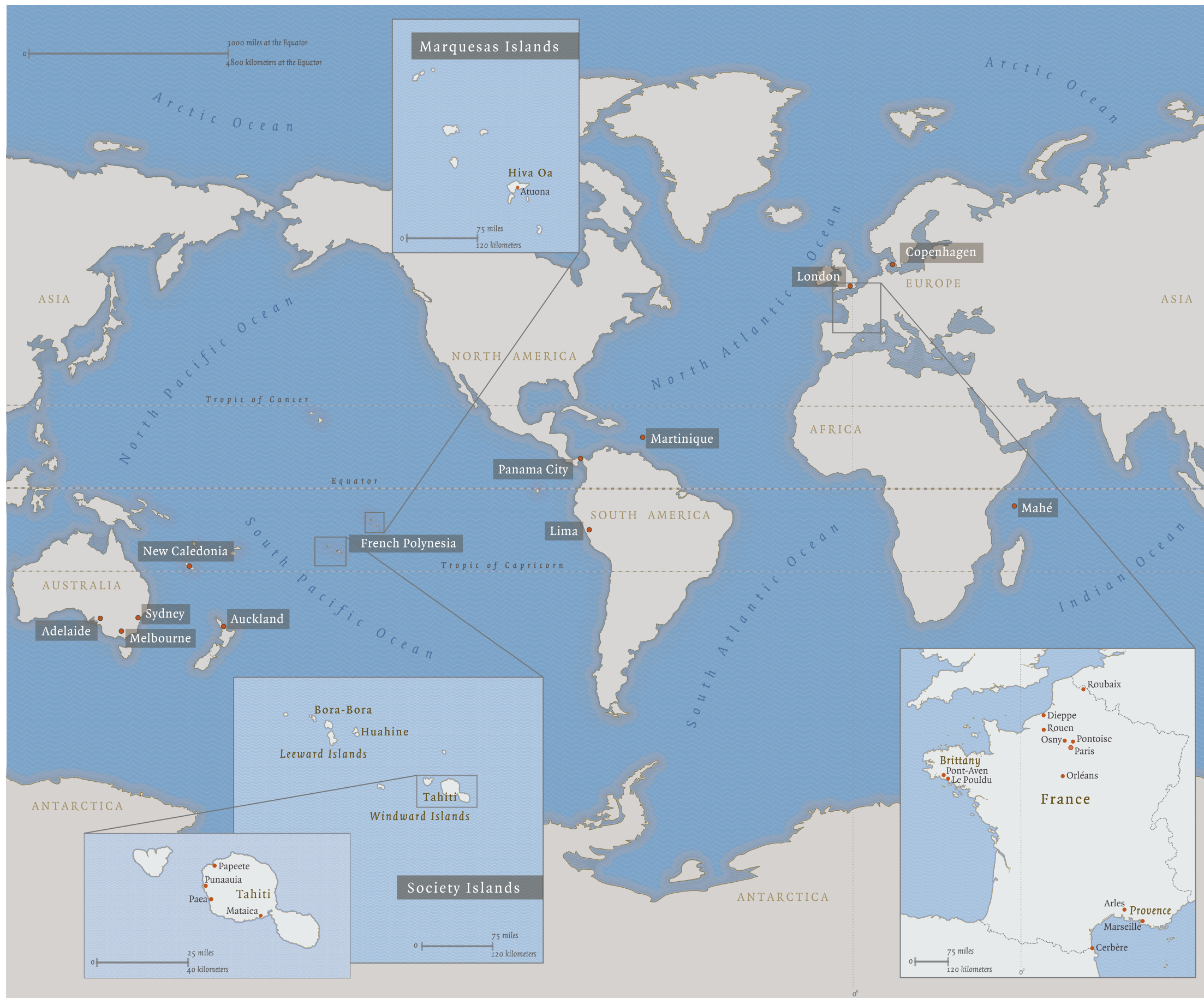
63 / Field documents eighty-nine oil transfer drawings created between 1889 and 1903 in *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, cat. nos. 35–123. It is assumed that Gauguin made others that were lost or destroyed.

64 / Letter from Paul Gauguin to Gustave Fayet, March 1902, quoted in Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, p. 21.

65 / For more on Gauguin’s oil transfer techniques, see Erika Mosier’s essay in this volume, pp. 65–70.

66 / The exact contents of Gauguin’s package to Vollard are unknown. Field, however, convincingly proposes the ten works to be those he has numbered 64–73 in *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, which include the works I note by plate number here.

67 / Field argues that “there is good evidence” that Vollard, once again overlooking the merit in Gauguin’s unusual techniques and experiments, sent the prints to Gauguin’s trusted friend, the artist and collector George-Daniel de Monfreid, who “turned them over (or sold them)” to Gauguin’s most important patron, Gustave Fayet. See Field, *Paul Gauguin: Monotypes*, p. 28.



Map of Gauguin's Travels

- 1848 Paris (June 1848–August 1849)
- 1849 Lima (August 1849–1854)
- 1854 Orléans (late 1854–1862)
- 1862 Paris (1862–1864)
- 1864 Orléans
- 1865 Begins traveling around the world with the merchant marine (1865–71)
- 1871 Paris (1871–1884)
- 1879 Pontoise (Summer)
- 1883 Osny • Cerbère (August)
- 1884 Rouen (January–October?) • Roubaix (October)
Copenhagen (November 1884–June 1885)
- 1885 Paris (June–July) • Dieppe (July–September) • London (September)
Dieppe (September–October) • Paris (October 1885–July 1886)
- 1886 Pont-Aven (July–October) • Paris (October 1886–April 1887)
- 1887 Panama City (April) • Martinique (May–October)
Paris (November 1887–January 1888)
- 1888 Pont-Aven (January–October) • Arles (October–December)
Paris (December 1888–June 1889)
- 1889 Pont-Aven (June) • Le Pouldu (June–August)
Pont-Aven (August–October) • Le Pouldu (October 1889–February 1890)
- 1890 Paris (February–early June) • Le Pouldu (early June) • Pont-Aven (mid-June)
Le Pouldu (late June–November) • Paris (November 1890–April 1891)
- 1891 Copenhagen (March) • Paris (March–April) • Marseille (April)
Mahé, Seychelles (April) • Sydney; Adelaide; Melbourne (April–May)
New Caledonia (May) • Papeete (June–August) • Paea (August–September)
Mataiea (September–October) • Papeete (October)
Mataiea (October or November?–early 1892)
- 1892 Papeete (early 1892–March?) • Mataiea (March? 1892–March 1893)
- 1893 Papeete (March–June) • Paris (August 1893–May 1894)
- 1894 Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu (May–November)
Paris (November 1894–June 1895)
- 1895 Marseille (late June–early July) • Sydney; Auckland (August) • Papeete (September)
Huahine (September) • Bora-Bora (September) • Papeete (October–November)
Punaauia (November 1895–July 1896)
- 1896 Papeete (July) • Punaauia (July 1896–January 1897)
- 1897 Papeete (January) • Punaauia (February 1897–March 1898)
- 1898 Papeete (March or April 1898–January 1899)
- 1899 Punaauia • Papeete
- 1900 Punaauia • Papeete
- 1901 Papeete • Punaauia (through September)
Atuona, Hiva Oa (September 1901–May 1903)



1886-1889

Paris · Martinique · Brittany · Arles

PAINTING, CERAMICS, ZINCOGRAPHY

The Volpini Suite

Gauguin's use of printmaking as a means for reimagining his earlier compositions and motifs began with his very first prints — eleven zincographs he created in 1889 and included in a group show held at a café near the Universal Exhibition in Paris. Known collectively as the *Volpini Suite* (after the café's owner) and housed together in portfolio form, the prints mostly revisit subjects from paintings Gauguin made during or shortly after trips to Brittany (July–October 1886; January–October 1888), Martinique (May–October 1887), and Arles (October–December 1888). He had already reprised some of the paintings' motifs in the highly inventive ceramics he created in Paris between 1886 and 1888, so in some cases the printed versions represent a third or even fourth or fifth iteration. The prints, which feature unconventionally shaped compositions (pls. 3, 10), details that extend beyond the picture borders (pls. 6, 9, 14, 16), and evocative textural passages, also demonstrate Gauguin's realization that printmaking could be a medium through which to experiment with new aesthetic effects.

The images showing scenes from Brittany (pls. 6, 9, 10, 12) and Martinique (pls. 14, 15) generally represent tranquil moments in bucolic landscapes, though there is one Breton image (pl. 10) that refers to the violence of nature, a theme that is also treated in a print whose setting is unspecified (pl. 3). Like these latter two prints, scenes of Arles focus on darker aspects of life, evoking drudgery (pl. 17), misery (pl. 7), and old age and death (pl. 16). Even in many of the seemingly happier images, however, Gauguin's printed revisions turn his subjects into something vaguely disturbing. In *Joies de Bretagne* (*The Pleasures of Brittany*; pl. 9), he remade the female figures he had portrayed in an 1888 painting (pl. 8), but rather than again showing them dancing in an expansive field, he depicted them in close-up, perhaps not dancing at all, beside strange, cloudlike bales of hay—the almost surreal atmosphere compounded by the bizarre, masklike appearance of the right-hand figure's face.



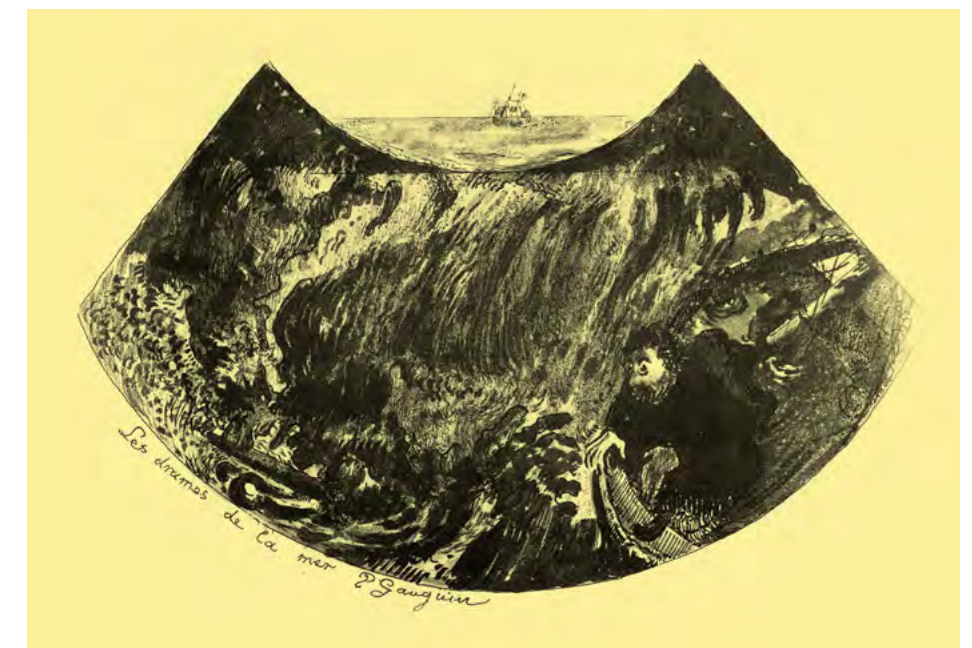
The portfolio's cover image (pl. 2) epitomizes the complex symbolism at work throughout the prints. The female is essentially a detail of another Volpini print, *Baigneuses Bretonnes* (*Bathers in Brittany*, pl. 6). But by superimposing a swan over her and surrounding her with images of a snake, Breton goslings, and an apple, Gauguin here combines themes of pastoral innocence with erotic references to both the classical myth of Leda (whom Zeus, in the guise of a swan, seduced) and the biblical story of Eve's temptation. **SF**



1
Pot in the Shape of the Head and Shoulders of a Young Girl. 1887–88
Partly glazed stoneware with colored slip, 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (20 cm) high
Private collection

2
Leda (*Projet d'assiette*) (*Leda* [Design for a China Plate]). Cover illustration for the *Volpini Suite*. 1889
Zincograph on yellow paper with watercolor and gouache additions, comp. 8 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 8 $\frac{1}{16}$ " (20.4 × 20.4 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund

3
Les Drames de la mer: Une Descente dans le maelstrom (*Dramas of the Sea: Descent into the Maelstrom*) from the *Volpini Suite*. 1889
Zincograph on yellow paper, comp. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (17.1 × 27.3 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund



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