

# After Impressionism

from Van Gogh to Matisse (1886-1906)

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## Presentation

Taking its name from the critic Louis Leroy's derisive comment about Claude Monet's painting *Impression soleil levant* (*Impression, Sunrise*) during the first exhibition of the group in 1874, the impressionist movement received at first hostile, sometimes aggressive criticism. With time the public became familiar with this new vision and the "painters of light" broadened the circle of their advocates. Merchants started to develop an interest in them and to convince collectors of their worth. Some impressionist painters still preferred trying their luck at the official Salon, with variable success. In 1886, during the eighth and last exhibition of the group, Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir no longer exhibited their works with Edgar Degas, Mary Cassatt, Berthe Morisot, Camille Pissarro... Paul Gauguin presented pieces for the fourth time, and new names made their appearance, in particular Georges Seurat and Paul Signac.

The young painters of the 1880's, confronted with an artistic scene profoundly marked by impressionism, reacted in different ways. Some followed their elders, exploring new paths, others moved away. Until the end of the century, diverging innovating tendencies coexisted: neo-impressionism, synthetism, nabis, whereas artists like Cézanne, van Gogh or Toulouse-Lautrec worked in their own autonomous directions. Yet these innovators had one thing in common: all refused naturalism, which had become the official style of the end of the century.

## Neo-impressionism

The group constituted around Seurat and Signac formed part of the heritage of impressionism and accepted the name "neo-impressionist" bestowed upon them by the critic Félix Fénéon. Their concern was to put scientific theories to the service of art. They shared an interest in the works of Eugène Chevreul who, in his book entitled *De la loi du contraste simultané* (*Of the Law of Simultaneous Contrast*, 1839), explained how any colour diffuses its complementary onto its environment (so that a red object appears to be surrounded by green; a yellow object by violet; a blue object by orange), and they transposed this observation directly on canvas. In reference to Charles Blanc's *Grammaire des arts du dessin* (*Grammar of Drawing Arts*, 1867), their fundamental principle is that of optical blending: the association of juxtaposed colours on the canvas gives more striking colours than colours obtained by blending pigments beforehand on the palette. Finally, they were interested, in particular Seurat, in the psychology of sensations developed by Charles Henry in his *Introduction à une esthétique scientifique* (*Introduction to Scientific Aesthetics*, 1885). According to these theories, art, like sciences, is ruled by laws. Upward lines induce joy, downward lines sadness, bright colours are related to euphoria, dark ones to

melancholy... To this group of more or less rigorous systems, neo-impressionists, also called "pointillists" because of the use they made of the juxtaposition of strokes, added social preoccupations. Like their elder Camille Pissarro, for a time an adept of pointillism, the painters Signac, Maximilien Luce and the critic Félix Fénéon took sides with the anarchist movement. In 1886, the last impressionist exhibition at which Seurat presented *Un dimanche après-midi à l'île de la Grande-Jatte* (*A Sunday Afternoon at the Grande-Jatte Island*) was an occasion for the public to discover this new form of painting. After Seurat's death in 1891, Signac pursued his aesthetic research and in 1899 he published *D'Eugène Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism*, a text in which he explains the theories of colour the movement was founded on.

## Cloisonnisme and Synthetism

Paul Gauguin, who was close to the impressionists until 1886, felt an urge to distance himself from modern civilisation. His desire to return to untouched natural surroundings first took him to Brittany, looking for the "wilderness", the "primitive". "When my clogs sound on this granite ground, I can hear the muffled, mat and powerful sound I am looking for in painting" he wrote in 1888 to his friend Schuffenecker. His style radically diverged from that of neo-impressionism, which he qualified with irony with the phrase "ripipoint" movement. He found his inspiration in the reality that surrounded him, recomposing it through an abstract play on forms and colours. He did not aim at producing a realistic effect and he abolished all kinds of perspective. He used wide patches of flat tints in vivid colours and simplified motifs, the outlines of which he marked by wide lines to underline them. Schematisation of the shapes and exaltation of colours were the main characteristics of this new trend, called synthetism, that offered a vision of reality that was both simple and thoroughly reconstructed. This tendency was partially derived from cloisonnisme, invented in 1886 by a young painter, Louis Anquetin, who referred to the technique of stained glass, but who also found inspiration in Japanese etchings, images from Epinal and primitive arts. In the village of Pont-Aven in Brittany, many artists worked around Gauguin, including many foreigners and several French artists, among whom Émile Bernard and Paul Sérusier. They shared a common willingness to abolish the hierarchy of major and minor arts, and their pictorial innovations were accompanied by a spiritual quest that connected them to symbolism. Before pursuing further his quest for exoticism and primitivism, in Tahiti and then in the Marquise islands, Gauguin took part in the impressionist and synthetist group exhibition set up in the Café Volpini in Paris in 1889, an exhibition that profoundly marked the young artists that were to gather under the appellation of "nabis".

## The "nabis"

Paul Sérusier showed a group of young painters attending the Julian Academy, a workshop where teaching was freer than that of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National High School of Fine Arts), a small painting he had made in Pont-Aven during the summer of 1888 following Gauguin's advice: "How do you see these trees? They are yellow. So, put in yellow; this shadow, rather blue, paint it with pure ultramarine; these red leaves? Put in vermilion". This *Paysage au Bois d'Amour* (*Landscape in the Bois d'Amour*), with its shapes simplified to the verge of abstraction, pure colours in flat tints, became *The Talisman* for Pierre Bonnard and his friends who made up the "nabis" group (after the Hebrew for "prophets"). The nabis' preferred motifs were interior scenes and portraits of groups or individuals. In their paintings, the decorative aspect prevailed and they wanted art to be present everywhere, and not solely on "easel paintings". They were interested in all kinds of media, making folding partitions, interior decorations, designing posters, theatre sets, costumes, illustrating books, by turns painters, sculptors, engravers... The nabis were great admirers of Japanese art as Paris was discovering it through the intermediary, among others, of the gallery owner Siegfried (known as Samuel) Bing, specialist in Far-East arts and editor, from 1889 to 1891, of a review entitled *Le Japon artistique* (*Artistic Japan*). This influence was particularly evident in the bold framing and the questioning of traditional perspective. Maurice Denis, a member of the group, published the *Définition du néo-traditionnisme* (*Definition of Neo-Traditionism*) in 1890, in which he underlined that "a painting, before being a battle horse, a nude woman or any anecdote, is essentially a plane surface covered by colours assembled in a certain order".

This visit, an occasion to study artists that did not belong to a particular movement, such as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and representatives of the trends indicated above, chronologically covers the end of the period corresponding to the Musée d'Orsay collections and, more generally, the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The modernity of 20<sup>th</sup>-century painting is evoked through the beginning of fauvism, but it is with Pablo Picasso and *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) that it culminated, and the discovery should be continued in the collections of museums of modern art...

## Preparation and follow-up to the visit

### Primary schools

For younger children, it may be more useful to give a few chronological landmarks rather than evoke the issues relating to art history and artistic movements. The artworks shown along this circuit have no thematic unity, and it is rather on pictorial aspects that the preparation will focus.

- study of colours

- indicate the three primary colours: blue, yellow and red. Have them mixed two by two to obtain the secondary colours: orange, green and violet.
- introduce the notion of complementary colours through simple exercises: have the pupils fix a well-lit bright yellow sheet of paper, and then ask them to look at a white wall or to close their eyes, and let them notice the appearance of a violet taint.

- show that one's perception of a colour varies according to the colour that is juxtaposed to it: have the pupils paint the same red square on four sheets. Leave one as it is and around the three others paint respectively a green, an orange and a violet frame. The children will notice that in each case the red looks different.

- evoke, in a simple manner, the difference between the physical blend of colours and their optical blend: have them paint three objects with the so-called secondary colours, resulting from the blending of primary colours two by two, and then ask the pupils to paint the same objects using, without blending them, the primary colours disposed in small, juxtaposed strokes.

- perception of space

- to the front / at the back: with younger pupils, study the notions of near and far away. With the help of images, photographs or pictures of paintings, identify the foreground, the background and middle distances.

- on / under: have the pupils look at the same scene seen from below, from the front or from a high angle and notice the different perceptions. Again use pictures of artworks to try and find out the supposed place occupied by the painter or photographer. Introduce, if necessary, the terms of high angle, frontal and low angle shot.

- observe the relationship between the directions of the lines and the expressions obtained: have the pupils draw the outline of a face. Introduce in succession in the drawing of the eyes, nose and mouth horizontal lines (impression of calm), upward lines (impression of mirth) and downward lines (impression of sadness).

### Junior and senior high schools

- based on the presentation above, present the characteristic elements of the main pictorial movements evoked during the visit. This introduction may also be made through brief oral presentations by the pupils.

- screen and discuss one or more films of the "Palettes" series listed below in the bibliography.

- with older pupils, study the connections between painting and the other arts of the time and investigate a selection of themes.

- study of colours

- briefly remind the pupils of the basic principles described in the above "primary schools" section.

- have the pupils make a chromatic circle. Trace a circle inside which is inscribed an equilateral triangle. The three primary colours are disposed at the three summits of the triangle. Secondary colours are diametrically opposed to them. Create between them the intermediary colours by graduating the blends.

- show that two complementary colours exalt each other when juxtaposed. Trace a disk in a primary colour, blue for instance. Draw an orange circle around it and examine the phenomenon. Repeat the exercise leaving a white space between the disk and the circle, and notice the phenomenon of mutual exaltation diminishes. Replace the white space by a wide circle in a dark taint (as in stained glass work), the phenomenon disappears.

- introduce the notion of tones in rupture: blend a primary colour with a growing proportion of its complementary. Notice the progressive loss of intensity.

- same thing for toned down or degraded tones: the more black is added to a colour, the more it is said to be "toned down". Conversely, the more white is added, the more "degraded" it is said to be.

- remind pupils of the meaning of the term "value": to speak of the value of a colour is to precise the degree of light or obscurity. Have them observe, using pictures of artworks, colours of bright, average or dark values. To achieve this, half-shut the eyes. The taints are no longer perceptible but the different zones are still distinguishable through their degree of value.

- perception of space

- remind the pupils that the introduction of an impression of depth in an artwork made on a two-dimensional surface consist for the artist in finding ways to "deceive" the eye.

- have pupils observe pictures of artworks in which the artists use different means to suggest the third dimension. A distinction may then be made between the so-called linear perspective implying the use of the vanishing point (the point in the horizon to which all the lines converge) and the progressive shrinking of the elements on the painting as they are supposed to be further away from the foreground, and the so-called

atmospheric perspective that suggests depth through the play on contrasts in values diminishing according to distance (e.g. the further away the elements are supposed to be, the lighter the values are and the more the whole takes a tonality verging on blue).

- the artworks selected for the circuit were made by artists that deliberately questioned this concern with the restitution of the impression of a third dimension. Those of them who adopted multiple viewpoints opened the path cubist painters were to follow. Show the pupils a few pictures of paintings by Picasso (*Portrait of Dora Maar* or *Maia With Doll*, for instance), in which the artist assembles elements seen from different angles.

- the expressive value of lines

- pursue the observations suggested above (for primary schools) with other fields than that of the human face.

## List of artworks

(This list is for information only, it allows for an overview of the collections of the Musée d'Orsay on the chosen theme. When a guide is conducting the visit, (s)he remains free to decide which artworks to present.)

### Post-impressionism

- Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890):  
*L'Église d'Auvers-sur-Oise, vue du chevet (The Church in Auvers-sur-Oise, View of the Chevet)*, June 1890  
*La Chambre à Arles (The Bedroom in Arles)*, 1889  
*Portrait de l'artiste (Portrait of the Artist)*, 1889
- Paul Cézanne (1859-1906):  
*La Femme à la cafetière (The Woman With A Coffee Pot)*, circa 1895  
*Pommes et oranges (Apples and Oranges)*, circa 1895-1900  
*Les Joueurs de cartes (The Card Players)*, circa 1890-1895
- Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901):  
*Jane Avril dansant (Jane Avril Dancing)*, 1891  
*La Toilette (Woman Washing)*, 1896  
*Panneaux pour la baraque de la Goulue à la Foire du Trône à Paris (Panels for the Booth of La Goulue at the Foire du Trône in Paris)*, 1895

### Neo-impressionism

- Georges Seurat (1859-1891):  
*Cirque (Circus)*, 1891  
*Poseuse de face (Model, Front View)*, 1887  
*Port-en-Bessin, marée haute (Port-en-Bessin, High Tide)*, 1888
- Paul Signac (1865-1935):  
*Femmes au puits (Women at the Well)*, 1895  
*La Bouée rouge, Saint Tropez (The Red Signal, Saint-Tropez)*, 1895
- Maximilien Luce (1858-1941):  
*Les Batteurs de pieux (The Pile Drivers)*, 1902-1903
- Henri Matisse (1869-1954):  
*Luxe, calme et volupté (Luxury, Calm and Delight)*, 1904

### Cloisonnisme and synthetism

- Paul Gauguin (1848-1905):  
*Autoportrait au Christ jaune (Self-Portrait with the Yellow Christ)*, 1890-91  
*La Belle Angèle (The Beautiful Angèle)*, 1889  
*Femmes de Tahiti ou Sur la plage (Women from Tahiti or On the Beach)*, 1891
- Émile Bernard (1868-1941):  
*Madeleine au Bois d'Amour (Madeleine at the Bois d'Amour)*, 1888  
*Moisson au bord de la mer (Harvest by the Seaside)*, 1891
- Paul Sérusier (1864-1927)  
*Le Talisman, l'Aven au Bois d'Amour (The Talisman, The River Aven at the Bois d'Amour)*, 1888  
*L'Averse (The Shower)*, 1895

## The Nabis

- Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947):  
*Le Corsage à carreaux (The Checked Blouse)*, 1892  
*Au lit (In Bed)*, 1891
- Maurice Denis (1870-1945):  
*Les Muses (The Muses)*, 1895
- Félix Vallotton (1865-1925):  
*Le Ballon (The Ball)*, 1899  
*Le Dîner, effet de lampe (The Dinner, by Lamplight)*, 1899

## Fauvism

- André Derain (1880-1954):  
*Pont de Charing Cross (Charing Cross Bridge)*, 1906
- Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958):  
*Restaurant de la Machine à Bougival (Restaurant de la Machine in Bougival)*, circa 1905

## Bibliography

### Post-impressionism

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- Guy Cogeval, *Les années post-impressionnistes*, Nouvelles Éditions françaises, 1988
- Albert Aurier, *Le symbolisme en peinture. Van Gogh, Gauguin et quelques autres*, Caen, L'Échoppe, 1991

#### Paul Cézanne

- Michel Hoog, *Cézanne, The First Modern Painter*, Thames & Hudson, 1991
- Cézanne, *The Early Years 1859-1882*, catalogue of the Musée d'Orsay exhibition, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1988
- Cézanne, catalogue of the exhibition at the Galeries Nationales du Grand-Palais, RMN, 1995
- Paul Cézanne, *Correspondance*, new edition, Grasset et Fasquelle, 1978
- *Conversations avec Cézanne*, critical edition presented by P.M. Doran, Macula, 1978
- Musée d'Orsay slides, *Cézanne*, two sets of ten slides (AS 10 0055 and 10 0056)
- Cézanne, le film de l'exposition, film by Jean-Paul Fargier, VHS, 26 minutes, RMN, 1995
- *La violence du motif. La Montagne Sainte-Victoire (1870-1886) by Paul Cézanne*, film by Alain Jaubert, "Palettes" series, VHS, 26 minutes, Montparnasse editions
- *I, Paul Cézanne*, CD-ROM, RMN / Télérama / Index+, Mac/PC version, 1995

#### Vincent van Gogh

- Pascal Bonafoux, *Van Gogh, The Passionate Eye*, Thames & Hudson, 1987
- *Van Gogh à Paris*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay, RMN, 1988
- Musée d'Orsay slides, *Van Gogh*, two sets of ten slides (AS 10 0055 and 10 0056)
- *La haute note jaune. La Chambre à Arles (1889) de Vincent van Gogh*, film by Alain Jaubert, "Palettes" series, VHS, 26 minutes, Montparnasse editions
- Joëlle Bolloch and Laurence Madeline, *Van Gogh et la chambre à Arles*, CD-ROM, "Fenêtres sur l'art" collection, Vilo Multimédia/La Cinquième multimédia/RMN edition, Mac/PC version, 1998
- Frédéric Sorbier, *Mission Soleil*, CD-ROM, Index+/Media Factory, PC version, 1998

#### Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec

- Claire and José Frèches, *Toulouse-Lautrec, Painter of the Night*, Thames & Hudson, 1991
- *Toulouse-Lautrec*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Galeries Nationales du Grand-Palais, RMN, 1992
- Textuel (collective work), *Le Temps de Toulouse-Lautrec*, RMN, 1991
- Musée d'Orsay slides, *Toulouse-Lautrec*, a series of ten slides (AS 10 0054)
- *Une légende fin-de-siècle. Panneaux pour la baraque de la Goulue (1895) de Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec*, film by Alain Jaubert, "Palettes" series, VHS, 26 minutes, Montparnasse editions

### Neo-impressionism

- Françoise Cachin, *Seurat, le rêve de l'art-science*, Gallimard "Découvertes" / RMN, 1991
- *Seurat*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Galeries Nationales du Grand-Palais, RMN, 1991
- Textuel (collective work), *Le Temps Seurat*, RMN, 1991
- *Signac et la libération de la couleur*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Grenoble museum, RMN, 1997
- Paul Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme*, new edition, Hermann "Savoir", 1987
- Félix Fénéon, *Au delà de l'impressionnisme*, Hermann, 1966
- Musée d'Orsay slides, *Post-Impressionism*, a series of ten slides (AS 10 0057)
- *L'Utopie orange, vert, pourpre. Un Après-midi à l'île de la Grande Jatte (1886) de Georges Seurat*, film by Alain Jaubert, "Palettes" series, VHS, 26 minutes, Montparnasse editions
- Frédéric Sorbier, *At the Circus with Seurat*, CD-ROM, RMN / Gallimard jeunesse / France Télécom, Mac/PC version, 1996

#### Paul Gauguin, Pont-Aven School, cloisonnisme, synthetism

- Françoise Cachin, *Gauguin, The Quest of Paradise*, Thames & Hudson, 1989
- Antoine Terrasse, *Pont-Aven, l'École buissonnière*, Gallimard "Découvertes" / RMN, 1995
- *Gauguin*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, RMN, 1989
- *Paul Sérusier*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Pont-Aven museum, 1991
- *Émile Schuffenecker*, catalogue of the exhibitions at the museums in Pont-Aven and Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 1996
- Paul Gauguin, *Avant et après*, Éditions Avant et Après, 1989
- Musée d'Orsay slides, *Gauguin*, a series of ten slides (AS 10 0041), École de Pont-Aven, a series of ten slides (AS 10 0058)

### The Nabis

- *Les Nabis*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, RMN, 1995
- Claire Frèches and Antoine Terrasse, *Les Nabis*, Flammarion, 1990
- Guy Cogeval, *Vuillard, le temps détourné*, Gallimard "Découvertes" / RMN, 1995
- *Maurice Denis, 1870-1943*, catalogue of the exhibition at the Lyon museum, RMN, 1994
- Maurice Denis, *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie*, Hermann, 1995
- Musée d'Orsay slides, *Bonnard*, a series of ten slides (AS 10 0054), *Les Nabis*, a series of ten slides (AS 10 0059)
- *Maurice Denis et la peinture nabis*, film by Edwige Kertès, VHS, 22 minutes, RMN, 1995
- *Les Allées du souvenir. Les Jardins publics (1894) d'Édouard Vuillard*, film by Alain Jaubert, "Palettes" series, VHS, 26 minutes, Montparnasse editions

### Fauvism

- Patrice Bachelard, *Derain, un fauve pas ordinaire*, Gallimard "Découvertes" / RMN, 1994

# After Impressionism

## from Van Gogh to Matisse (1886-1906)

### • The visit: the artworks

The location of artworks within the museum rather than chronological order determines the order of the circuit: the pupils should be told that Henri Matisse's and André Derain's paintings are from a later period than the others.

#### 1. Vincent Van Gogh (1855-1890):

*L'Église d'Auvers-sur-Oise, vue du chevet (The Church in Auvers-sur-Oise, View of the Chevet)*, June 1890

- location: upper level, gallery 35
- the background: after staying in the south of France, in Arles and then at the psychiatric hospital in Saint-Rémy de Provence, Vincent Van Gogh settled in Auvers-sur-Oise, a village in the outskirts of Paris. His brother Théo, concerned with his health, incited him to meet the Doctor Gachet, himself a painter and a friend of numerous artists, who accepted to treat him. Van Gogh settled at the Ravoux Inn; during the two months separating his arrival, on May 21, 1890 and his death on July 29, the artist made about seventy paintings, over one per day, not to mention a large number of drawings.
- the subject matter: it is the only painting representing in full the church in Auvers that may sometimes be distinguished in the background of views of the whole village. This church, built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the early Gothic style, flanked by two Romanesque chapels, became under the painter's brush a flamboyant monument on the verge of dislocating itself from the ground and from the two paths that seem to be clasping it like torrents of lava or mud. Van Gogh described this painting – painted, apparently on June 3 or 4 – in a letter to his sister Wilhelmine: "I have a large painting of the village church, an effect where the building looks purplish against a simple and deep-blue sky, of pure cobalt, the stained glass windows look like ultramarine blue stains, the roof is violet and partly orangey. In the foreground, a little greenery in bloom and sunny pink sand. It is again the same thing I did with the studies I made in Nuenen of the old tower and of the cemetery, but now the colour is probably more expressive, more sumptuous."
- observe: if one compares this painting with Claude Monet's Cathedrals, painted shortly afterwards, one can measure how different Van Gogh's approach was from that of the impressionists. Unlike Monet, he did not try to render the impression of the play of light on the monument. Even though the church remains recognisable, the painting does not so much offer the spectator a faithful image of reality than a form of "expression" of a church. The artistic means used by Van Gogh anticipate the work of the fauvists and expressionist painters.

#### 2. Paul Cézanne (1859-1906):

*La Femme à la cafetière (The Woman with a Coffee Pot)*, circa 1895

- location: upper level, gallery 36
- the background: this painting, undated like most paintings by Cézanne, was probably painted around 1895. The artist had by then moved away from the impressionist movement for over twenty years. His favourite subject matters were landscapes, still-lives and portraits.
- the subject matter: it is the portrait of an

unidentified woman, most likely one of the servants employed in the family mansion of Le Jas de Bouffan, near Aix-en-Provence. Cézanne had difficulties working with professional models and most often he represented acquaintances and relatives: his wife, his son, his neighbours, his friends and, many times, he painted self-portraits. He did not seek to render the psychology of his characters, and even excluded in most cases all form of individualisation. It may be excessive to say that he treated portraits as still-lives, although he was reported to have remarked to a model, losing her patience after a long sitting session: "Does an apple ever move?"

- observe: Cézanne abolished traditional perspective, the position of the table, tipped up frontward, contradicts the frontality of the character. The vertical lines of the central fold of the dress answer those splitting the spoon into two lobes, the horizontal line of the belt that across the coffee pot. His geometric rigour is contradicted by the irregular network of lines of the cupboard panels behind the woman and by the flowered wallpaper. *The Woman with a Coffee Pot* is no doubt one of the paintings that best illustrate Cézanne's determination to "treat nature via the cylinder, sphere and cone."

#### 3. Paul Gauguin (1848-1903):

*Autoportrait au Christ jaune (Self Portrait with the Yellow Christ)*, 1890-91

- location: upper level, gallery 43
- the background: this self-portrait is the last, or one of the last, Gauguin painted before he first left for Tahiti. The artist evoked the sentiment of solitude and discouragement he felt at the time: "In the end, this isolation is a delusion of happiness, unless one is ice-cold, absolutely insensitive. In spite of my efforts to become so, I am not, nature always prevails, like *Gauguin as a pot*, his hand smothering the shout that is trying to escape in the blaze." (letter to Émile Bernard, November 1889)
- the subject matter: this is a triple self-portrait. Gauguin represented himself, facing the spectator in a three quarter profile on a background reproducing two previous artworks by himself. First we can see, inverted since Gauguin sat before a mirror, a fragment of the *Yellow Christ*, painted in 1889. Inspired by the polychrome wood crucifix housed in the Trémalo chapel, in the vicinity of Pont-Aven, this image brings a symbolical note to the self-portrait: the Christ's widely opened arms of rise above the artist in a protective gesture. Besides, Gauguin represented the *Pot in the Shape of a Grottesque Head, Self-Portrait* he had made in enamelled sandstone in 1889, which he described as "roughly a head of Gauguin the wild man". This piece of ceramics embodies his longing for primitive things, the return to the source. *The Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ* is therefore not a mere workshop portrait, but a re-composition in which every element is significant, evoking an aspect of the artist "half-



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angel, half-beast", half way between synthetism and primitivism.

- observe: the balanced composition of the painting, its vigorous technique combine to express the fierce energy that animated the artist. Gauguin's face is partly in shadow and partly in light, echoing the inverted contrast of value for the elements of the background, the Christ in the light, the pot in the shadow. On the face, the clearest value is situated on the forehead; a way to demonstrate that the artist's brain participates in creation as much as his hand?

#### 4. Émile Bernard (1868-1941):

*Madeleine au Bois d'Amour (Madeleine at the Bois d'Amour)*, 1888

- location: upper level, gallery 43
- the background: Émile Bernard was twenty

1. Vincent Van Gogh : *L'Église d'Auvers-sur-Oise, vue du chevet*, June 1890  
2. Paul Cézanne : *La Femme à la cafetière*, circa 1895  
3. Paul Gauguin : *Autoportrait au Christ jaune*, 1890-91

when he sojourned in Pont-Aven with his mother and sister, together with Gauguin. This was a period teeming with friendship and emulation in which the basics of *cloisonnisme* and synthetism were elaborated. A rivalry was soon to emerge as each painter was to claim the paternity for these theories.

- the subject-matter: Madeleine Bernard (1871-1895), Émile's sister, was then 17 years old. Artists, in particular Paul Gauguin, used her as a model on several occasions. The latter painted her bust portrait in an interior scene, whereas Emile Bernard painted her lying, in a landscape. In both cases it is a symbolical representation, that did not aim at resemblance: "He [Gauguin] made the portrait of my sister, while I painted her in the Bois d'Amour, in the attitude of a recumbent statue. Of course neither Gauguin or I painted anything else of my sister than a caricature, considering our ideas of the time concerning character [...]." This transposition found no doubt inspiration in Puvis de Chavannes and his *Bois sacré cher aux Arts et aux Muses* (*Sacred Wood Dear to Arts and Muses*), exhibited at the 1884 Salon.

- observe: the large format, seldom used in Pont-Aven productions. The flat, dull colours, the shapes reduced to the essential, the emphatic outlines are characteristic of *cloisonnisme* and synthetism. Bounded within their emphatic outlines, the flat tints are not properly speaking treated in pure colours, but blends are few and the touch hardly visible. The line of horizon is absent and there is no vanishing point to evoke depth. This is rendered through the superposition of horizontal planes: the lying body and the strips of the landscape separated by the river.

5. Georges Seurat (1859-1891):  
*Cirque* (*Circus*), 1891

- location: upper level, gallery 45
- the background: after his large compositions representing characters in landscapes (*Bathers, Asnières*, 1884; *A Sunday Afternoon at the Island of La Grande-Jatte*, 1886), Seurat turned to the representation of female nudes (*Models*, 1888), and then to the world of performances (*Circus Parade*, 1888; *Uproar*, 1889-90). He exhibited *Circus*, together with six *Seascapes*, at the 1891 Salon des Indépendants.
- the subject matter: circus performances were then very popular, and the work of many artists testified, including Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec. Seurat turned the Fernando Circus (since renamed Medrano Circus), near his workshop, into an anonymous circus. One can see evolving on the ring a horsewoman riding a white horse, Mr Loyal holding his whip, a clown standing behind him and mocking his gait, an acrobat clown and, seen from the back, slightly menacing, a final clown who seems to be directing the scene. The clothes and attitudes of the spectators characterise different stereotypes and social classes. On their black-velvet-bordered seats, first-class spectators wear furs, feathers or top hats;

behind them, the second-class public, more simply dressed, sit on wooden benches, while at the top, cap-wearing boys and girls without hats are leaning over the balustrade.

- observe: Seurat is not interested in rendering depth and the perspective is improbable. For instance, it is logically not possible for the painting's spectator to see all members of the public from the front and with the same size, whatever their positions on the different levels of tiers. The painter used upwards lines from left to right, giving a sensation of joy, movement and dynamism: the curve of the ring, the angle formed by the horse back and the rider... Seurat isolated his painting by painting a dark border directly on the canvas and a frame treated in the same blue.

6. Paul Signac (1863-1935):  
*Femmes au puits* (*Women at the Well*), 1895

- location: upper level, gallery 46
- the background: after Seurat's death in 1891, Signac pursued his work both as a painter and as the theoretician of the neo-impressionist group. In 1892, he decided to leave Paris for Saint-Tropez where he was to spend six months a year until 1915.
- the subject matter: after making several small-format paintings of the harbour in Saint-Tropez during the summer 1892, Signac set about a large composition the following year. This was to become *Le Temps d'Harmonie*, an allegory of the ideal society and an illustration of happy life, in 1894. In one of his first sketches for this painting, one can see two women busy drawing water from a well. Signac decided to isolate these two characters and to devote a painting to them. All the elements of the landscape in which he set the scene really exist in Saint-Tropez: the hill with the citadel at the top, the sea and the jetty of the harbour, the Maures hill and the Estérel foothills, but the painter synthesised them at his will, creating a new landscape on the canvas after several drawings and preparatory studies. The painting was exhibited at the 1895 Salon des Indépendants, with the title *Jeunes Provençales au puits* (*décoration pour un panneau dans la pénombre*) (*Young Girls from Provence at the Well* (*decoration for a panel in the shade*)). The subtitle chosen by Signac seconds the opinion of the critic Félix Fénéon who detected in the artist's work "an art with a great decorative development, that sacrifices anecdote to arabesque, inventory to synthesis."
- observe: it is possible to see in this composition an homage to Seurat's *Circus*. There are certainly similarities between the organisation of the pictorial space (for instance the sinuous oblique line of the hill and the diagonal formed by the horse and its rider, the line followed by the path evokes that corresponding to the whip...). Both paintings were made with primary colours (blue, yellow and red), but Signac added the complementary colours (orange, green and violet), and he aimed at giving the impression light is generated by the painting itself, through the use of vivid, sometimes acid tones.



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7. Henri Matisse (1869-1954):  
*Luxe, calme et volupté (Luxury, Calm and Delight)*, 1904

- location: upper level, gallery 46
- the background: Matisse had read Signac's essay *D'Eugène Delacroix au néo-impressionnisme (From Eugène Delacroix to Neo-Impressionism)* published in *La Revue blanche*. He met the painter on the occasion of the 1904 Salon des Indépendants and accepted his invitation to spend the summer in Saint-Tropez. He made this painting there, and it constitutes a kind of assessment of the contribution of neo-impressionism.
- the subject matter: at first entitled *Les Baigneuses (The Bathers)*, this painting was rooted in the bourgeois reality of a tea party on the beach, Matisse's version of a lunch on the grass. But it ended up on the side of Puvis de Chavannes and of a vision of the Golden Age, a pagan version of the Christian paradise. Besides Puvis de Chavannes with his *Doux pays (Sweet Country)*, many painters have illustrated this theme, from Ingres to Cézanne and Gauguin, and Signac himself, whose *Au temps d'harmonie (In the Time of Harmony)*, initially entitled *Au temps d'anarchie (In the Time of Anarchy)*, evoked the regenerated vision of the future dreamt by socialists and anarchists. While turning his naturalistic picnic into an Arcadia, Matisse modified its title, quoting a verse of *L'invitation au voyage* by Baudelaire. The choice of the neo-impressionist technique was very ephemeral in Matisse's career, and he quickly told Signac of his doubts: "Did you find in my painting of the *Bathers* a perfect harmony between the character of the drawing and the character of the painting? According to me, they look totally different, and even absolutely contradictory. One, the drawing, depends on linear plastic or sculptural art, and the other, painting, depends on coloured plastic art. The result: the painting, mostly divided, destroys the drawing that gains all its eloquence from the outline."
- observe: Matisse did not exclusively use the neo-impressionist technique in this painting. Instead of modelling the limit from an object to another through colour and its graduation as Signac did, Matisse simplified and cut, colouring for instance two legs of a same character with two different tints. Besides, the outline of the elements are drawn, with a more or less marked outline.

8. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901):  
*Jane Avril dansant (Jane Avril Dancing)*, 1891

- location: upper level, gallery 47
- the background: very early on, Toulouse-Lautrec adopted Montmartre as his favourite haunt. He frequented circuses, café-concerts, cabarets, dances and brothels. To represent them, he used diverse techniques, depending on the subject matter or on the artwork's destination: pencil, painting on canvas, petrol painting on cardboard, lithography...
- the subject matter: Jane Avril (1868-1945) developed a passion for dancing as she took part

in a dance organised at the Salpêtrière hospital where she was interned due to a nervous breakdown. From then on she never left the universe of performance, at first a dancer, then a comedian. Nicknamed "La Mélinite", she became one of the stars of the Moulin Rouge quadrille aged twenty, but her true calling was solo dancing. "Jane Avril danced, whirled, graceful, light, a little mad, pale, thin, racy... she whirled, weightless, feeding on flowers; Lautrec shouted his admiration." Paul Leclercq, a friend of the painter, reported. Toulouse-Lautrec represented his model several times, dancing, as in this painting; entering the Moulin Rouge dressed as an elegant bourgeois lady; on posters advertising performances at the Jardin de Paris or the Divan Japonais.

- observe: the framing of the scene focuses on the character in the foreground, the depth is accentuated by the vanishing lines. The artist was interested in both the leg movement and the personality of the model: the speed of the leg movement is suggested by the blur and confusion of the lower part of the body, whereas the face is treated as a portrait, finely-worked. The rest of the painting is quickly sketched, the cardboard remaining largely visible, in the background.

9. Paul Sérusier (1864-1927):  
*Le Talisman, l'Aven au Bois d'Amour (The Talisman, the Aven River at the Bois d'Amour)*, 1888

- location: upper level, gallery 48
- the background: the landscape chosen for this "painting lesson" is the same Emile Bernard chose as a background for the portrait of his sister. A close observation reveals certain elements of reality: the wood, in the top, on the left, the transversal path, the row of beech trees on the river bank and the mill, to the right, at the back. Each of these elements is turned into a stain of colour. According to Maurice Denis, Gauguin had told Sérusier: "How do you see these trees? They are yellow. So, put in yellow; this shadow, rather blue, paint it with pure ultramarine; these red leaves? Put in vermilion". Although they were determined that visual sensation should prevail over the intellectual perception of the world, the impressionists had not given up a conception of painting implying the representation of what they observed. Here the mimetic conception is thoroughly replaced by the search for a coloured equivalent. Maurice Denis explained that in front of this landscape, he and his friends felt "liberated from all the yokes that the idea of copying brought to [our] painters' instincts" and that they knew then "that any artwork was a transposition, a caricature, the passionate equivalent of a received sensation."
- observe: it is an artwork painted on a small wooden panel (and not as it has often been said on the lid of a cigar box). The painter applied primary colours in large strokes: yellow for the trees, blue for the shadows, vermilion for the leaves; and



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their complementaries: green for the foliage, violet for the mill. The use of white was limited to the bluish-white zone in the foreground. There is not the slightest willingness to render the effect of depth, and the two-dimensional quality of the painting is affirmed, announcing Maurice Denis's phrase "a plane surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order."

7. Henri Matisse : *Luxe, calme et volupté*, 1904

8. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec : *Jane Avril dansant*, 1891

9. Paul Sérusier : *Le Talisman, l'Aven au Bois d'Amour*, 1888

10. André Derain (1880-1954):  
*Pont de Charing Cross (Charing Cross Bridge)*,  
1906

- location: gallery 50, Max and Rosy Kaganovitch collection
- the background: in 1905 André Derain spent the summer in Collioure with Matisse who was still marked by his neo-impressionist experiment. It was barely a year since the latter had painted *Luxe, calme et volupté*. During the same year, at the Salon d'Automne in Paris, a gallery at the Grand-Palais showed artworks by Matisse, Derain, Vlaminck, van Dongen... The critic of *Gil Blas*, Louis Vauxcelles, seeing a sculpture in the middle of the vividly-coloured paintings, commented: "But this is Donatello surrounded by the fauves!", thus giving fauvism its name.
- the subject matter: in late 1905, early 1906, Derain sojourned in London, and he brought back some thirty paintings, many of which views of the Thames. For this *Charing Cross Bridge*, the artist placed his stand on Waterloo Bridge, in order to command a high-angle view on the pedestrians and cars on the Victoria Embankment. One can recognise, in the background, the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, two of London's most popular buildings the image of which was at the time widely known through postcards. Even though the place is easy to identify, Derain was not guided by a concern with naturalism. He gave a modern vision of the city with its smoke and its animation. The curved line of the Embankment, the inclination of the cars, the bending silhouettes of pedestrians, suggest speed. The elongated shape of the wreaths of smoke, perpendicular to the direction of the traffic, suggest another activity, derived from the river.
- observe: In this painting, Derain combined two ways of using colour. First he treats in flat tints the zones corresponding to the road, the sidewalks, the trees and, partly, the buildings. He neutralised the effect of simultaneous contrast (the exaltation of two juxtaposed complementary colours) by outlining each coloured area: the green of the road is separated from the red by a wide blue line. He also used yellow strokes in association with blue touches for the sky and the water, in the manner of the neo-impressionists.

11. Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947):  
*Le Corsage à carreaux (The Chequered Blouse)*,  
1892

- location: median level, gallery 72
- the background: Pierre Bonnard, then at the beginning of his career, discovered Japanese art thanks to two exhibitions in Paris, the first in 1888, at the art dealer Siegfried Bing's (known as Samuel Bing), the other two years later at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. He was profoundly marked by this discovery, and was even nicknamed "nabi très japonard" within the Nabi group.
- the subject matter: the woman who served as model for *Le Corsage à carreaux* is Andréée

Terrasse (1872-1925), the artist's sister and the wife of the composer Claude Terrasse. This piece owes its oblong format to the influence of kakemonos, paintings on silk or on paper, suspended vertically and that may be rolled around a stick, of which the height is, as it is the case with Bonnard's painting, roughly equal to twice the width. Bonnard also found inspiration in the layout of the Ukiyo-e, those etchings in which the characters are often cut by the frame and in which the symmetry familiar in Western art was ignored. He chose unusual angles: the table is seen from a high angle, and, tipped over, it is in the same plane as the character, who is seen from a low angle. This multiplication of viewpoints reminds one of Cézanne's dislocations and anticipates those of Picasso and Braque. The painting has at first sight a decorative aspect because of the cloth's motif, but Bonnard counterbalanced this effect with the foreground that is difficult to decipher.

- observe: the manner in which Bonnard achieves an impression of volume without using either traditional perspective or modelling. On the blouse, made of flat cloth, unmarked by the shape of the body, he traced arabesques suggesting anatomy, creating an illusion of shape by drawing. He proceeded likewise for the chin, suggested by a simple line, and for the volume of the head, evoked by the arabesque of the curl.

12. Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940):  
*Jardins publics (Public Gardens)*, 1894

- location: median level, gallery 70
- the background: Alexandre Natanson, one of the *Revue Blanche* directors, commissioned from Edouard Vuillard nine panels to decorate the dining room of his flat on the Avenue du Bois, since renamed Avenue Foch. The panels have been dispersed, and five of them now belong to the Musée d'Orsay collections.
- the subject matter: Vuillard chose the theme of Paris gardens, interpreted freely, without aiming at accuracy. Like his fellow painters of the Nabi group, the painter refused to separate art from daily life and adopted an attitude that was to be summed up by Jan Verkade, another member of the group, in the following terms: "No more stand paintings! Painting must not usurp a liberty that separates it from other arts. There are no paintings, there are only decorations." Several sources can be identified for these panels by Vuillard. To fulfil his desire of an intimist rendering, he thought of the tapestries of the Musée de Cluny: "How humble are the subject matters of these Cluny decorations! Exhibition of an intimate sentiment on a larger surface." For his subject matter, he turned to the impressionists, in particular Monet and his *Femmes au jardin (Women in the Garden)*. His flat painting, chalk-like colours evoking frescos, are reminiscences of Puvis de Chavannes and his mural decorations. To this effect, he used glue painting, i.e. powder pigments mixed with glue and diluted in hot water.



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- observe: Vuillard was also, like Bonnard, profoundly marked by Japanese art, and this may be felt in his compositions. He did not choose to place his main group in the centre, and did not try to counterbalance it with other figures that would serve as a foil. De-centring, dissymmetry, disequilibrium are deliberate. Humans have no more importance than natural elements. Bernard Dorival, a specialist of Nabi painting, speaks of "disanthropocentration" of painting.