Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903)
***Pont-Aven Breton Woman in Profile*,** 1886

Watercolor and black crayon on paper

Collection of Ceil Pulitzer

To Gauguin, the unspoiled rusticity of Pont Aven in Brittany felt "savage and primitive," compared to the slick urbanity of Paris. This study is one of several that date to Gauguin's first trip to Pont Aven in 1886. The distinctive shape of the woman's traditional headdress became a common feature of the works produced by the artists who gathered in Pont Aven, likewise the jewel-like tones, bounded by contour lines, and overall flatness, seen here. An inscription to the extreme right edge of the watercolor commemorates Gauguin's friendship with Émile Bernard, for whom it was a gift. Bernard worked closely alongside Gauguin during these years and was also one of the few artists who remained close to Van Gogh once he had removed himself from Paris to the South of France.

Émile Bernard (French, 1868–1941)
***Women Walking on the Banks of the Aven*,**
1890

Oil on canvas

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Museum purchase funded by Mr. and Mrs. Raymond H. Goodrich, by exchange

By 1890, the year of Van Gogh's premature death, Bernard had achieved a more delicate version of Cloissonnism (so named because of the flat areas of color, defined by dark contour lines, resembling stained-glass windows or cloisonné enamels), a stylized elegance that was completely his own. This painting corresponds perfectly to Van Gogh's description of his young friend's art: "He seeks to do modern figures as elegant as ancient Greeks or Egyptians. A grace in the expressive movements, a charm through daring colors." After Van Gogh's death, Bernard would go on to ally himself with the group of artists known as Symbolists, which included Odilon Redon and the Swiss artist Ferdinand Hodler, whose abstracted Alpine landscapes this painting resembles in its stylization.

Émile Bernard (French, 1868–1941)
***Still Life with Apples and Breton Crockery*,**
1892

Oil on canvas

Private Collection, Santa Barbara

In this large-scale still life, Bernard uses the traditional crockery of Brittany as both the subject and source of inspiration for his own, modern reassertion of painting as decoration. Like Sérusier, Bernard sought to foreground the materiality of paint and canvas, asserting rather than denying the literal flatness of the picture plane and the artist's freedom to wield color without succumbing to the superficial imitation of things seen. The abstracted floral motifs used to decorate the stoneware remain as summary as the washes of pigment used by Bernard to suggest the rounded forms of the apples and spouted coffee pot.

Bernard, who was a frequent correspondent of Van Gogh, is also remembered today for the letters he exchanged with Paul Cézanne, an older artist whom he idolized and whose still-life paintings of similar dimensions this composition readily recalls. Interestingly, Van Gogh mentions Cézanne relatively infrequently, at least in the correspondence that survives. One wonders if he was familiar with the older artist's early work, which shares the heavier impasto and deliberate gaucherie found in Van Gogh's art.

Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903)
***Christmas Night (The Blessing of the Oxen)*,**
1902–3

Oil on canvas

The Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Samuel Josefowitz Collection of the School of Pont-Aven, through the generosity of Lilly Endowment Inc., the Josefowitz Family, Mr. and Mrs. James M. Cornelius, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard J. Betley, Lori and Dan Efroymson, and other Friends of the Museum

Although this painting is still set in Brittany, as indicated by the snow-covered rooftops of its steeple and cottages, this composition was likely done after the artist had relocated to the exotic locale of Tahiti. The figure types definitely resemble his famed depictions of Tahitian women, here transplanted to the wintery landscape of Pont Aven at Christmas. Gauguin's synthesis of imagery derived from disparate sources (the oxen originate from Egyptian tomb sculpture and the figures of the shrine are drawn from an ancient Javanese frieze that he knew through a documentary photograph), was meant to communicate an authenticating primitiveness.

Van Gogh remained adamant in his belief that Gauguin's abandonment of nature as the necessary point of departure and his willingness to take on even biblical subjects, as invented through imagination alone, was completely off-course. In this regard, Van Gogh remained a Realist, while Gauguin's confabulations prefigured the dream-like, visionary art of the next generation of Symbolists.

Paul Sérusier (French, 1864–1927)
Landscape at Le Pouldu**,** 1890

Oil on canvas

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Gift of Alice C. Simkins in memory of Alice Nicholson Hanszan

Gauguin exhorted Sérusier to paint as he saw, rather than as things were expected to be seen, so that trees could be yellow, shadows ultramarine blue, and leaves, vermillion. In 1890, fellow artist Maurice Denis wrote that a painting "is essentially a flat surface covered with color assembled in a certain order." The consequences of this declaration would lead inexorably to 20th-century abstraction.

Van Gogh would likely have argued with the validity of such a statement. However, in this painting, he would have also felt a certain kinship with Sérusier's bold use of color and willingness to bend the landscape into repeated shapes that read as surface design as well as receding planes. As Vincent wrote to Theo: "Where these lines are close together and deliberate the painting begins, even if it may be exaggerated. That's what Bernard and Gauguin feel a little bit, they won't ask for the correct shape of a tree at all, but they absolutely insist that one says if the shape is round or square—and my word, they're right.

Exasperated by certain people's photographic and inane perfection. They won't ask for the correct tone of the mountains but they'll say: for Christ's sake, were the mountains blue, then chuck on some blue and don't go telling me that it was a blue a bit like this or like that, it was blue wasn't it? Good—make them blue and that's enough!"

Vincent van Gogh

***The Langlois Bridge*,** July 1888

Brown ink over traces of black chalk

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, George Gard De Sylva

The rigorous control exhibited in this superb drawing is evidence of the discipline that Van Gogh could exert over this medium by the summer of 1888. The supple tip of the reed pen conjures the varied compositional elements of foliage, brick, wood, and water, with the greatest of economy—essentially a series of dashes and dots, expertly arranged to achieve representational legibility, yet never denying the pervasive flatness of the overall decorative scheme. The paper support itself reads effortlessly as both solid and void, as necessary. This drawing, which is a repetition after a painted version of the same motif, pays overt homage to a famous print by Hiroshige and belonged to Vincent's good friend, Émile Bernard.

Utagawa Hiroshige, *Sudden Evening Shower on the Great Bridge near Atake*, from the series *One Hundred Views of Famous Places in Edo*, 1857. Color woodcut. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Armand Guillaumin (French, 1841-1927)
***Banks of the Creuse*,** 1903

Oil on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Dwight and Winifred Vedder

When this painting was done, Van Gogh had already been dead for more than a dozen years. Arguably, the manner in which it is painted, especially the violent extremes of juxtaposed complementary hues, is indebted to Van Gogh's example. Guillaumin was one of the Van Gogh brothers' inner circle from the Paris years onward. Although he exhibited with the Impressionists and maintained friendships with them, as well as with the younger generation of Post-Impressionists, such as Gauguin and Van Gogh, Guillaumin had an independent streak that became more pronounced once his winnings from a government lottery in 1891 gave him the financial independence to do as he pleased.

The psychedelic palette of Guillaumin's landscapes of these years is said to anticipate the work of Matisse and the Fauves. Certainly, the avant-garde assimilation of Japanese woodblock prints is on full view here in the overall decorative effect of this tapestry of color.

Vincent van Gogh

***Sheaves of Wheat*,** July 1890

Oil on canvas

Dallas Museum of Art, The Wendy and Emery Reves Collection

This landscape was made in the last month of Van Gogh's life, during the wheat harvest in the fields around Auvers-sur-Oise. Van Gogh had agreed to return north to Auvers, just outside of Paris, to be treated by Dr. Paul Gachet, a doctor recommended by his friend, the artist Camille Pissarro. Gachet, himself an aspiring artist, befriended Vincent, and his home and family provided some of the last subjects for Van Gogh's art.

Van Gogh made thirteen of these so-called double squares, a format that was preferred by Van Gogh's artist-hero, the plein-air painter, François Daubigny, who lived and died in Auvers. The close perspective on the sheaves of wheat, combined with the high horizon and calligraphic, repeated dashes of pure pigment are signs of Van Gogh's complete assimilation of the vocabulary of Japanese woodblock prints. However, the thickness of the paint application, at times enough to create cast shadows, is entirely alien to a Japanese aesthetic. No matter how near or far we are to the painted surface, its patterning retains its representational legibility, even though we are conscious of the decorative repeated dashes of which the entire canvas is made up. The overall visual interest and invitation to close viewing is akin to that of the woodcut illustrations that Vincent admired, whether from the pages of illustrated magazines like *The Graphic* or his favorite Dickens' novels. In the 20th century, this unique quality of Van Gogh's mature style would become the most emulated and hardest to imitate aspect of his art.

SCAN ME

Armand Guillaumin (French 1841–1927)

***Woman Reading*,** ca. 1898

Oil on canvas

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Gift of Bruce and Laurie Maclin

This impressive painting is one of several that depict the artist's wife, Marie-Joséphine Gareton, who was a professor at a well-known women's school in Paris. It dates from the 1890s, arguably the best years of the artist's long career and already reflects his confident adaptation of a Post-Impressionist interest in increasingly abstracted forms and strong color contrasts. Like Gauguin and Van Gogh, who both knew and admired Guillaumin, the artist had a long-standing interest in Japanese art, as reflected in the decor of the room, which includes large images of courtesans and a crane, cropped on the wall behind the figure. The lower half of the wall is likely obscured by a gold-ground Japanese folding screen, somewhat easier to discern in a related pastel portrait of Madame Guillaumin in the same interior dated to 1892.

Katsushika Hokusai
(Japanese, 1760–1849)
***Fuji Seen from the Katakura Tea Plantation in the Suruga Province*, from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*,**
ca. 1830–32

Color woodblock print

Santa Barbara Museum of Art,
Lent by Janet Way Vlasach

Utagawa Hiroshige
(Japanese 1797–1858)
***Maiko Beach, Harima Province*, from the series *Views of Famous Places in Sixty-Odd Provinces*,**
ca. 1853

Color woodblock print

Santa Barbara Museum of Art,
Collection of Frederick B. Kellam

Utagawa Kunisada
(Japanese, 1786–1864)
***Hangaku-jo* from the series *Biographies of Famous Women, Ancient and Modern*,**
series issued 1859-1866

Color woodblock print

Santa Barbara Museum of Art,
Gift of Genevieve Kline

These three *ukiyo-e* (which translates to "floating-world pictures") woodblock prints are typical of the kinds of images that were so influential for several generations of avant-garde art, particularly in France. They demonstrate many of the properties that artists like Van Gogh readily adapted to replace the conventions of Western illusionism (the type of representational painting propagated by the Academy since the Renaissance). All three utilize the bright hues that Van Gogh attempted to bring into his own painting, especially after moving to Arles. In the Hiroshige, we see the motif of pine trees brought dramatically close up in the foreground, in comparison to the rapid recession implied by the zigzag of lapping waves on the shore (not dissimilar to Vincent's pine trees in St. Rémy in the painting nearby). In the Kunisada print, we see the flattening effect of the figure's patterned robe, which, along with the running-script calligraphy, assert the flatness of the image surface. Such flourishes of line find their counterpart in Vincent's etching of Dr. Gachet, on view nearby. Finally, in the Hokusai landscape of Mt. Fuji, we see the elevated perspective, oblivious to the laws of Western one-point perspective, in which up is back and the relative visibility of the compositional elements, no matter their spatial relation, remains consistent throughout. In some of Van Gogh's most brilliant landscape inventions, the presence of Hokusai's example can be clearly felt.

Vincent van Gogh, *The Harvest*, June 1888. Oil on canvas.
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
(Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Vincent van Gogh

Portrait of Dr. Gachet (Auvers-sur-Oise),

June 15, 1890

Etching

Lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of Bruce B. Dayton, 1962

"I've found in Dr Gachet a ready-made friend and something like a new brother would be—so much do we resemble each other physically, and morally too"
—Vincent to Willemien van Gogh, June 5, 1890

Although he was an avid admirer and collector of etchings by artists such as Rembrandt, Charles Jacque, and Constant Troyon, Vincent only made one etching himself: this portrait of Dr. Paul Ferdinand Gachet. Vincent met Dr. Gachet on the first day he arrived in Auvers; the doctor promised to keep an eye on Vincent's health, but the two quickly became friends over their mutual appreciation for art. An amateur etcher himself, Dr. Gachet gave Vincent the copperplate for this etching and helped him print several impressions on his personal press. The strong calligraphic lines and oversize head in this portrait hearken back not only to Japanese prints, especially the genre of Kabuki actor portraits, but also to the woodblock engravings by British illustrators that Van Gogh so admired.

Vincent van Gogh

***Hospital at Saint-Rémy*,** October 1889

Oil on canvas

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, The Armand Hammer Collection, Gift of the Armand Hammer Foundation

Van Gogh entered the psychiatric clinic in Saint-Rémy in May 1889. By September, he was well enough to be looking forward to the autumn landscapes that he hoped to paint around the hospital, including this one, in which, as he put it "I tried to reconstruct the thing as it may have been by simplifying and accentuating the proud, unchanging nature of the pines and the cedar bushes against the blue."

Though there are diminutive figures strolling in the foreground, the principal characters of this composition are the trees themselves. As in Japanese and Chinese ink painting, the trees are anthropomorphized, exuding the stately demeanor of long-time residents of an ancient landscape. Van Gogh exaggerates the uppermost limbs of the trees cropped to either side, so that their proportions generate a looming sense of monumentality as compared to the tiny figures below. This directional movement towards the upper register of the composition is reinforced by the energy of the repeated brushstrokes intermingling trees and sky.

SCAN ME