



Portrait of Theo van Gogh
Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942), 1888-1889

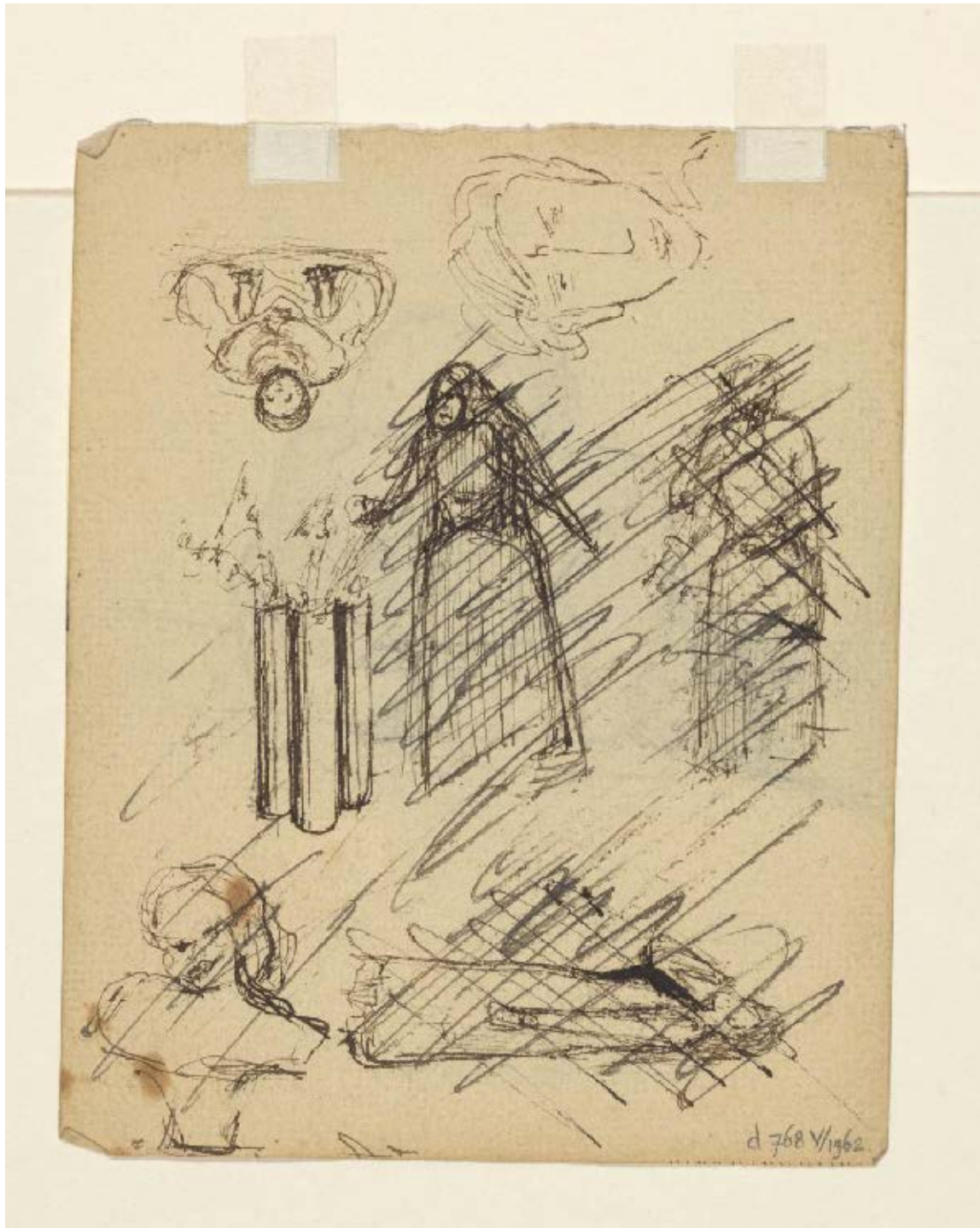


Landscape

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942), 1888-1889

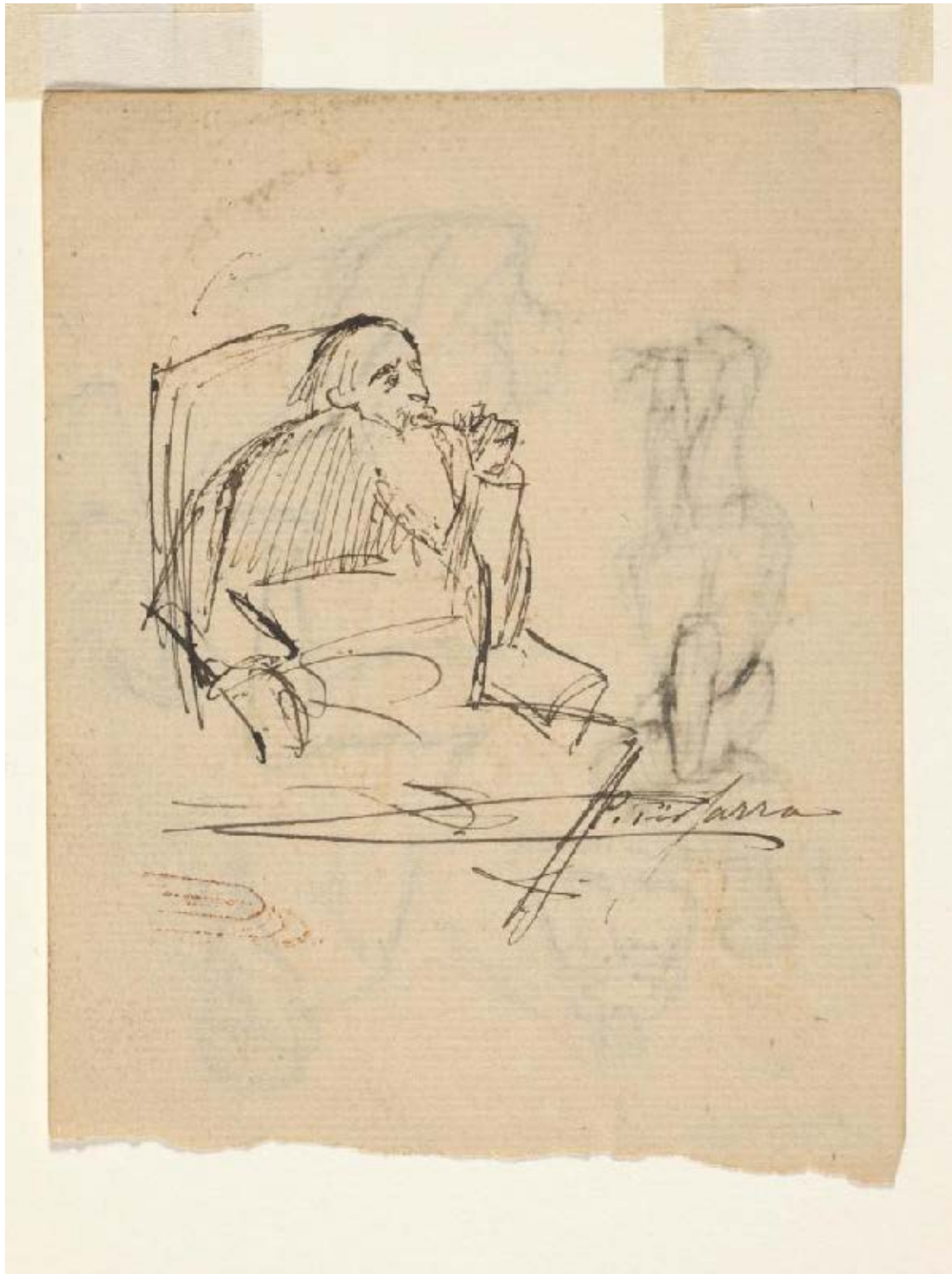


Portrait of Meijer de Haan
Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942), 1888-1889



Sketches of Figures and Heads

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942), 1888-1889



Portrait of Camille Pissarro with Pipe
Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942), 1888-1889



Sketches of Figures
Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942), 1888-1889



Sketches of Three Figures and Portrait of Theo van Gogh
Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942), 1888-1889



Sketches of Figures and a Candlestick
Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942), 1888-1889

Works Collected by Theo and Vincent van Gogh

Drawings

Joseph Jacob Isaacson

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859–1942) is remembered in art history more for his written contributions than for his own drawings and paintings. He was the very first critic in the Netherlands to write about Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), and his reviews of other French post-impressionists were exceptionally early as well. The sketches under discussion here were preserved by Theo van Gogh (1857–1891) and are now in the collection of the Van Gogh Museum. Comparative work by Isaacson from this period is not known. ⁰¹ An earlier drawing Isaacson made after a photograph shows that he drew with great virtuosity, albeit somewhat stiffly (fig. 1) .

Portraits

Isaacson's sketches were executed in pen and black ink on low-quality laid paper, and each of these four sheets are drawn on both sides. The rectos (front sides) feature figure studies and portraits, while the versos (reverse sides) consist mainly of fragmentary figures, some of which are partly scratched out, and possibly a city view. The uniform torn edges on one side and dimensions of the first three drawings suggest that they come from a sketchbook that Isaacson took along when he ventured out. In the portraits of Theo van Gogh (d0767) and Meijer de Haan (1852-95) (d0768), he applied cross-hatching to suggest shading and texture in the clothing and hair. However, the drawing of Camille Pissarro (1830-1903) (d0769) lacks this technique and appears simpler. ⁰²



Joseph Jacob Isaacson,
Portrait of Nanette Enthoven,
drawn after a photograph, 1881,
pencil on paper, 53 × 37 cm,
private collection. Photo: RKD -
Nederlands Instituut voor
Kunstgeschiedenis, RKDimages
(no. 1001087208)

This variation may indicate a difference in the nature of his relationships with these individuals. Isaacson considered Theo van Gogh and De Haan as friends and equals, while he looked up to the more established impressionist *père* Pissarro. In these three sketches, Isaacson adeptly captured the distinct appearance and postures of the sitters. Theo's focused and preoccupied demeanour, perhaps while putting a letter into an envelope, is aptly depicted. De Haan's pensive expression and recognizable deformed back are striking, and the shape of his face aligns with how he was later portrayed by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) (fig. 2). Pissarro is shown in a relaxed pose, smoking his pipe and sitting in an armchair. In contrast, the sketch of Theo in profile on the fourth cut-up sheet, with Isaacson's inscription of the name below it, appears more formal and lacks the depth of character and mood evident in the first three sketches.

Scribbles

On the same sheet as the latter sketch, as well as on the versos of d0768 and d0769, there are a series of somewhat stiff figure studies. On the verso of d0768, most of these figures have been crossed out, leaving only a very sketchy face and a seated child. On the verso of d0769, we see a figure resting his face in his hand, a woman sitting next to a (laundry) basket, a bent leg, two figures in difficult to define poses, and finally a standing figure dressed in what appears to be seventeenth-century clothing. This may be related to the work Isaacson and De Haan did in the Netherlands, which Theo mentioned in a letter to Vincent: apparently, they were painting costumes from Rembrandt's time. ⁰³ This same standing figure, now with a more distinct hat, is also seen on the recto of d0770, the sheet with the profile of Theo van Gogh, along with two stooping women near a (laundry) basket or tub. On the verso of d0770 are various sketches, likely made in Paris, including a hand lighting a candle, a face in three-quarter profile of an elderly man, two leaning female figures and a figure in profile wearing a large hat. No figure study is found on the verso of d0767, but instead a sketch resembling a typical Dutch city view with heavy clouds hanging low above a bell-gabled house. The sketch possibly pre-dates Isaacson's departure for Paris and is primarily an exercise in rendering dark and light through cross-hatching.

From The Hague to Paris

Isaacson was born in The Hague as the son of an antiquarian. His artistic journey began after he met the painter Christoffel Bisschop (1828–1904), which led him to enrol in the Hague Academy.⁰⁴ Around 1879, Isaacson left for London, where he supported himself by painting and drawing portraits for several months. He then worked with Willem de Zwart (1862–1931) in Hilversum and in 1881 began studying technical drawing at the Polytechnic School in Delft. Isaacson was able to pursue his artistic training thanks to a grant from the philanthropist A. C. Wertheim (1832–1897).⁰⁵ Around 1884, he was admitted as a pupil to De Haan's studio in Valkenburgerstraat in Amsterdam.⁰⁶ Along with his master and other students, he showed his work at the Panorama Building on Plantage Middenlaan in Amsterdam in June 1888. Unfortunately, the exhibition received a negative response from the press, prompting De Haan and Isaacson to relocate to Paris in search of new opportunities for their artistic careers. A review in *De Amsterdammer* newspaper referred to Isaacson as 'De Haan's once very promising pupil' and his work as 'a thick dark brown mass of paint, from which, with the best will in the world, one cannot make out the representation'.⁰⁷ Isaacson and De Haan's relationship evolved into that of close friends rather than merely a pupil and teacher dynamic. They spent about seven months together in Paris from autumn 1888 to summer 1889. Isaacson took anatomy classes at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.⁰⁸ During this period, De Haan resided with Theo van Gogh. During Isaacson's frequent visits to them, they would engage in intense discussions about art.⁰⁹ Theo enjoyed the conversations with his new friends, noting their 'unusual clarity of mind [...]. Isaacson, especially, strikes me as a real scholar.'¹⁰

The sketches under discussion most likely originated in this context, probably at Theo's home on rue Lepic. Thanks to Theo's contacts, De Haan and Isaacson had the opportunity to meet Pissarro (who, like them, came from a Jewish family) and many avant-garde artists of the younger generation.

First review of Van Gogh

After De Haan's departure for Brittany in the spring of 1889, Isaacson found himself somewhat adrift in Paris, and struggling financially as his allowance from Wertheim had ceased.¹¹ He did, however, visit the newlyweds Theo and Jo van Gogh-Bonger (1862-1925) around the same time that Pissarro did.¹² Writing provided Isaacson with a new, temporary purpose and a source of income during this challenging time. In one of his first pieces from August 1889, in which he reflected on the Dutch art on display at the time in the Paris Exposition Universelle, he faulted the work of his compatriots for being insensitive and uniform 'factory handiwork', dismissing them as paintings in name only.¹³ In this article, he contrasted it with the work of Vincent van Gogh, writing the now famous words: 'Who interprets for us in shapes and colours the magnificent life, the 19th century, the great life that is becoming conscious again? [...] One I know, a solitary pioneer; he stands alone struggling in the great night, his name Vincent, is for posterity.'¹⁴ In a footnote, Isaacson hinted at his intention to write more about this 'remarkable hero'. It was the first time Van Gogh had been mentioned in a Dutch art review. Van Gogh struggled to cope with such positive critique, as he also did six months later when Albert Aurier (1865-1892) wrote about him in the French press.¹⁵ Van Gogh asked Isaacson not to write anything about him for the time being.¹⁶ He did not believe his work was worthy of such praise yet, and said he would rather continue painting for another year to better show what he was capable of achieving.¹⁷ Isaacson honoured Van Gogh's request and refrained from writing extensively about him until after his death.



Paul Gauguin, *Portrait of Meijer de Haan*, 1889, oil on panel, 79.6 × 51.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Mr and Mrs David Rockefeller, inv. 2.1958. Photo: Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

In 1890, Isaacson returned to the Netherlands and wrote about the 'neo-impressionists' ('néo-impressionisten') in the journal *De Portefeuille: Kunst- en Letterbode*.¹⁸ Thanks to this little sketch and the Van Gogh family's letters, we know that Isaacson had regular contact with Pissarro, although he found Pissarro's paintings too rigid in execution and therefore lacking feeling. Yet he did consider *père* Pissarro as a mediator between two revolutionary groups of painters: the 'dot people' ('stippel-maar-raak-menschen'), or pointillists, with Claude Monet (1840–1926) as their leader, in his understanding, and the 'more emotional' artists, consisting of Edgar Degas (1834–1917), Emile Bernard (1868–1941), Gauguin, de Lothrijk [Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901)], Van Gogh, Armand Guillaumin (1841–1927), Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) and Odilon Redon (1840–1916).¹⁹ Following Theo's death in early 1891, Isaacson devoted an article to him, emphasizing Theo's wholehearted commitment and ability to represent the interests of the artists of his time.²⁰ According to Isaacson, good art dealers were rare and had to possess both intellectual acumen and artistic empathy, viewing their profession as a true calling.²¹

Late career

Eventually Isaacson managed to sustain himself as an artist and received a retrospective exhibition at the Koninklijke Kunstzaal Kleykamp in The Hague on the occasion of his seventieth birthday.²² The exhibition mainly showcased paintings of Oriental and biblical scenes in bright colours inspired by Isaacson's travels to Egypt in 1896 and 1905. Although the critics' responses were not entirely glowing, the exhibition did garner attention, and Isaacson still commanded a certain level of respect for his artistic contributions.²³

Sara Tas
November 2023

Citation

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 Copy citation



Object details

Portrait of Theo van Gogh

Artist

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942)

Date

1888-1889

Medium

pen and black ink on laid paper

Dimensions

14.8 cm x 11.9 cm

Inscriptions

Th. van Gogh.

Inventory Number

d0767V1962r

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Landscape

Artist

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942)

Date

1888-1889

Medium

pen and black ink on laid paper

Dimensions

14.8 cm x 11.9 cm

Inscriptions

Inventory Number

d0767V1962v

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Portrait of Meijer de Haan

Artist

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942)

Date

1888-1889

Medium

pen and black ink on laid paper

Dimensions

14.9 cm x 11.9 cm

Inscriptions

Meyer de Haan.

No 2

Inventory Number

d0768V1962r

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Sketches of Figures and Heads

Artist

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942)

Date

1888-1889

Medium

pen and black ink on laid paper

Dimensions

14.9 cm x 11.9 cm

Inscriptions

Inventory Number

d0768V1962v

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Portrait of Camille Pissarro with Pipe

Artist

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942)

Date

1888-1889

Medium

pen and black ink on laid paper

Dimensions

15.2 cm x 11.9 cm

Inscriptions

Pissarro

Inventory Number

d0769V1962r

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Sketches of Figures

Artist

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942)

Date

1888-1889

Medium

pen and black ink on laid paper

Dimensions

15.2 cm x 11.9 cm

Inscriptions

Inventory Number

d0769V1962v

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Sketches of Three Figures and Portrait of Theo van Gogh

Artist

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942)

Date

1888-1889

Medium

pen and black ink on laid paper

Dimensions

11.9 cm x 15 cm

Inscriptions

Van Gogh

Inventory Number

d0770V1962r

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Sketches of Figures and a Candlestick

Artist

Joseph Jacob Isaacson (1859 - 1942)

Date

1888-1889

Medium

pen and black ink on laid paper

Dimensions

11.9 cm x 15 cm

Inscriptions

Inventory Number

d0770V1962v

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Portrait of Theo van Gogh

Front & Back



Portrait of Meijer de Haan

Front & Back



Portrait of Camille Pissarro with Pipe
Front & Back



Sketches of Three Figures and Portrait of Theo van Gogh
Front & Back



Provenance

Portrait of Theo van Gogh

Probably left by the artist at the apartment of Theo van Gogh, Paris, between 1888 and 1889; after his death on 25 January 1891, inherited by his widow, Jo van Gogh-Bonger, and their son, Vincent Willem van Gogh, Paris; administered until her death on 2 September 1925 by Jo van Gogh-Bonger, Bussum/Amsterdam/Laren; after the death of Vincent Willem van Gogh on 28 January 1978, bequeathed to his heirs; transferred by the heirs of Vincent Willem van Gogh to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, 15 October 1982; since then on permanent loan to the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, and at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, since 1 July 1994.



Provenance

Landscape

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Provenance

Sketches of Figures

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Provenance

Sketches of Three Figures and Portrait of Theo van Gogh



Probably left by the artist at the apartment of Theo van Gogh, Paris, between 1888 and 1889; after his death on 25 January 1891, inherited by his widow, Jo van Gogh-Bonger, and their son, Vincent Willem van Gogh, Paris; administered until her death on 2 September 1925 by Jo van Gogh-Bonger, Bussum/Amsterdam/Laren; after the death of Vincent Willem van Gogh on 28 January 1978, bequeathed to his heirs; transferred by the heirs of Vincent Willem van Gogh to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, 15 October 1982; since then on permanent loan to the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, and at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, since 1 July 1994.

Provenance

Sketches of Figures and a Candlestick



Probably left by the artist at the apartment of Theo van Gogh, Paris, between 1888 and 1889; after his death on 25 January 1891, inherited by his widow, Jo van Gogh-Bonger, and their son, Vincent Willem van Gogh, Paris; administered until her death on 2 September 1925 by Jo van Gogh-Bonger, Bussum/Amsterdam/Laren; after the death of Vincent Willem van Gogh on 28 January 1978, bequeathed to his heirs; transferred by the heirs of Vincent Willem van Gogh to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, 15 October 1982; since then on permanent loan to the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, and at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, since 1 July 1994.



Exhibitions

Portrait of Theo van Gogh

Sapporo, Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, *Vincent & Theo van Gogh*, 5 July-25 August 2002, no. 64, *Portrait of Theo van Gogh*

Kōbe, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, *Vincent & Theo van Gogh*, 7 September-4 November 2002, no. 64, *Portrait of Theo van Gogh*



Exhibitions

Portrait of Meijer de Haan

Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, *Gauguin's Nirvana. Painters at Le Pouldu 1889-90*, 27 January-29 April 2001, no. 36, *Portrait of Meyer de Haan*

Amsterdam, Joods Historisch Museum, *De verborgen meester: Meijer de Haan*, 13 October 2009-24 January 2010, no. 32, *Portret van Meijer de Haan*

Paris, Musée d'Orsay, *Meijer de Haan, le maître caché*, 16 March-20 June 2010, no. 32, *Portrait de Meijer de Haan*

Quimper, Musée des Beaux-Arts (Quimper), *Meijer de Haan, le maître caché*, 8 July-11 October 2010, no. 32, *Portrait de Meijer de Haan*



Exhibitions

Portrait of Camille Pissarro with Pipe

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Theo van Gogh 1857-1891. Kunsthandelaar, verzamelaar en broer van Vincent*, 24 June-5 September 1999

Paris, Musée d'Orsay, *Theo van Gogh 1857-1891. Marchand de tableaux, collectionneur, frère de Vincent*, 27 September 1999-9 January 2000

Amsterdam, Joods Historisch Museum, *De verborgen meester: Meijer de Haan*, 13 October 2009-24 January 2010, no. 72, *Portret van Pissarro*

Paris, Musée d'Orsay, *Meijer de Haan, le maître caché*, 16 March-20 June 2010, no. 72, *Drawing of Pissarro*

Quimper, Musée des Beaux-Arts (Quimper), *Meijer de Haan, le maître caché*, 8 July-11 October 2010, no. 72, *Drawing of Pissarro*

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Kunstenaarsportretten Prentenkabinet*, 21 February-30 August 2020



Literature

Portrait of Theo van Gogh

- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, nos. 2.713 and 2.714, p. 483
- Roelof van Gelder, 'Zingzangende gedachten', *NRC Handelsblad* (30 March 1990), p. 3
- Jan Hulsker, 'Toch een portret van Theo door Vincent van Gogh', *Kunstwerk: Het kunstblad van Nederland* 4 (1992), p. 36; TS 3336
- Anonymous, *Vincent and Theo van Gogh*, exh. cat., Hokkaido (Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art) / Kobe (Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art), Hokkaido 2002, no. 64, p. 171
- Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, p. 75

Literature

Landscape



- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, nos. 2.713 and 2.714, p. 483
- Roelof van Gelder, 'Zingzangende gedachten', *NRC Handelsblad* (30 March 1990), p. 3
- Jan Hulsker, 'Toch een portret van Theo door Vincent van Gogh', *Kunstwerk: Het kunstblad van Nederland* 4 (1992), p. 36; TS 3336
- Anonymous, *Vincent and Theo van Gogh*, exh. cat., Hokkaido (Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art) / Kobe (Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art), Hokkaido 2002, no. 64, p. 171
- Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, p. 75

Literature

Portrait of Meijer de Haan



- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, nos. 2.715 and 2.716, p. 483
- Eric M. Zafran, *Gauguin's Nirvana: Painters at Le Pouldu, 1889-1890*, exh. cat., Hartford, CT (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art), New Haven, CT & London 2001, no. 36, pp. 30-31
- Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, p. 75

Literature

Sketches of Figures and Heads



- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, nos. 2.715 and 2.716, p. 483
- Eric M. Zafran, *Gauguin's Nirvana: Painters at Le Pouldu, 1889-1890*, exh. cat., Hartford, CT (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art), New Haven, CT & London 2001, no. 36, pp. 30-31
- Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, p. 75

Literature

Portrait of Camille Pissarro with Pipe



- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, nos. 2.717 and 2.718, pp. 483-84
- Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, no. 72, p. 75

Literature

Sketches of Figures



- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, nos. 2.717 and 2.718, pp. 483-84
- Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, no. 72, p. 75

Literature

Sketches of Three Figures and Portrait of Theo van Gogh



- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, nos. 2.719 and 2.720, p. 484
- Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, p. 75

Literature

Sketches of Figures and a Candlestick



- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, nos. 2.719 and 2.720, p. 484
- Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Joods Historisch Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, p. 75

Figures



Fig. 1

Joseph Jacob Isaacson, *Portrait of Nanette Enthoven*, drawn after a photograph, 1881, pencil on paper, 53 × 37 cm, private collection. Photo: RKD – Nederlands Instituut voor Kunstgeschiedenis, RKDimages (no. 1001087208)



Fig. 2

Paul Gauguin, *Portrait of Meijer de Haan*, 1889, oil on panel, 79.6 × 51.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Mr and Mrs David Rockefeller, inv. 2.1958. Photo: Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

Footnotes

- 01 See Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 19 October 1888 [↗ \[708\]](#). In it, Theo describes other drawings by Isaacson, which he saw as very good and original.
- 02 The handwriting is similar to that of Isaacson in letters addressed to Jo van Gogh-Bonger (1862–1925). The names written in pencil on the other two drawings were probably recorded later by Vincent Willem van Gogh, ‘The Engineer’ (1890–1978).
- 03 Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 19 October 1888 [↗ \[708\]](#): ‘as the costumes are from that period, people said it was a poor imitation of Rembrandt. [...] It’s mainly charcoal drawings that I’ve seen, their things having stayed in Holland’ (cependant comme les costumes sont de cette époque on a dit que c’était une mauvaise imitation de Rembrandt. [...] Ce sont surtout des dessins au fusain que j’ai vu, leurs affaires étant resté en Hollande).
- 04 Pauline I. de Haan, *J. J. Isaacson: Leven, werk, kritieken (*MA thesis), [n.p.] 1969. This biographical sketch is based on articles in the press, including interviews with the artists on Isaacson’s seventieth birthday in 1929.
- 05 Just Havelaar, ‘J. J. Isaacson’, *Elsevier’s Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* 77 (1929), p. 224. He received this allowance until the age of twenty-nine (1888), when he went to Paris. From then on, Isaacson faced financial difficulties.
- 06 Irene Faber, ‘Isaacson and Other Students of Meijer de Haan’, in Jelka Kröger and Sara Tas, *Meijer de Haan: A Master Revealed*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Jewish Historical Museum) / Paris (Musée d’Orsay) / Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Quimper), Paris & Amsterdam 2009, p. 75.
- 07 J. A. Alberdingk Thijm, ‘Noord- en Zuid-Hollandse ten-toon-stellingen VI (Slot)’, *De Amsterdammer, Weekblad voor Nederland* (15 July 1888), p. 3.
- 08 Kasper Niehaus, ‘J. J. Isaacson zeventig jaar’, *De Telegraaf* (20 April 1929). From the sketches on the back of these sheets, it is evident that he still had room for improvement in that respect.
- 09 This discussion continued through letters exchanged with Van Gogh, who, while in Arles, felt connected to the ‘Dutch friends’ and believed that they faced similar challenges as himself and Gauguin in implementing innovation in the arts. See Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 18 December 1888 [↗ \[726\]](#). Even later, Vincent shares his hope that they would one day join him and Gauguin: ‘with a view to this I had even rented two little rooms which became vacant in the house which I now have entirely’ (‘même dans cette vue-là j’avais loué deux petites chambres qui devenaient vacantes dans la maison qu’actuellement j’ai en entier’). Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 9 January 1889 [↗ \[735\]](#). However, after his mental breakdown and Gauguin’s departure, he dared not encourage other painters to come to Arles. About Isaacson and De Haan, he writes, ‘Let them go to Antibes, Nice, Menton’ (‘Qu’ils aillent à Antibes, Nice, Menton’). Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 18 February 1889 [↗ \[747\]](#).
- 10 Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 23 October 1888 [↗ \[711\]](#): ‘I wanted to tell you the unusual clarity of mind that they have [...]. Isaäcson, especially, strikes me as a real scholar’ (‘je voulais te dire la singulière clareté d’esprit qu’ils ont [...] Surtout Isacson m’a l’air d’un vrai savant’).

- 11 Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 16 July 1889 [↗ \[792\]](#): 'I don't know what he ought to do, but what he's painting is poor! He talks about art better than he does it.' ('Je ne sais pas ce qu'il faudrait qu'il fasse, mais ce qu'il peint est d'un maigre! Il parle mieux sur l'art qu'il en fait.')
- 12 Jo van Gogh-Bonger, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 5 July 1889 [↗ \[786\]](#).
- 13 J. J. Isaacson, 'Parijsche Brieven III. Gevoelens over de Nederlandsche kunst op de Parijsche Wereld-tentoonstelling', *De Portefeuille: Kunst- en Letterbode* (17 August 1889), p. 248.
- 14 Ibid.: 'Wie vertolkt ons in vormen en kleuren het geweldige leven, het 19e eeuwse, zich weêr bewust wordende groote leven? [...] Een ken ik, 'n eenige pionier; hij staat alleen te worstelen in den grooten nacht, zijn naam Vincent, is voor het nageslacht.'
- 15 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Albert Aurier, 9 or 10 February 1890 [↗ \[853\]](#).
- 16 Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 4 October 1889 [↗ \[807\]](#); Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, around 25 October 1889 [↗ \[815\]](#): 'No need to tell you that I find what he says about me in a note extremely exaggerated, and one more reason why I prefer him not to say anything about me' ('Pas besoin de te dire que je trouve extrêmement exagéré ce qu'il dit de moi dans une note et raison de plus pour que je préfère qu'il ne dise rien de moi'); and Vincent van Gogh, letter to Joseph Jacob Isaacson, 25 May 1890 [↗ \[RM21\]](#).
- 17 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 5 October 1889 [↗ \[808\]](#).
- 18 In the Netherlands, Isaacson made plans to travel the Transvaal in South Africa. Vincent thought this would be good for him because, without ever having met him in real life, he recognized in Isaacson his own 'moral fatigue' ('geestelijke vermoeidheid') with the city of Paris, but he wrote: 'I'll regret it on our account, for I have lots and lots of fellow-feeling for him, and would greatly desire to make his acquaintance personally' ('moi je le regretterai pour nous car je sens beaucoup beaucoup de sympathie pour lui et aurais grand desir de faire sa connaissance personnellement'). Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 25 October 1889 [↗ \[815\]](#). Vincent thought about giving him a self-portrait as a keepsake (*Self-Portrait*, 1889, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC). He also believed that Isaacson would be a suitable husband for their sister, Wil van Gogh (1862–1941): 'That would be better for him than this journalist's life, and perhaps would get him back on his feet better. For I'm touched by the fact that one feels so much from what he says that he's a very suffering and very good person, happy when he can admire' ('Cela vaudrait mieux pour lui que cette vie de journaliste et peut-être le mettrait mieux à flot. Car j'en suis touché qu'on sent tellement dans ce qu'il dit que c'est un être tres souffrant et très bon, content quand il peut admirer'). Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 25 October 1889 [↗ \[815\]](#). The extent to which there was serious talk about marriage plans with Wil is unknown and it is possible that it was simply a figment of Vincent's imagination. However, the Transvaal project was in fact serious, and another member of the Van Gogh family also played a role in this idea. Vincent and Theo's youngest brother, Cor (1867–1900), would emigrate there in 1889 and had met Isaacson while visiting Jo and Theo in Paris prior to his departure in August of that year (Jo van Gogh-Bonger, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 16 August 1889 [↗ \[795\]](#)). According to Vincent, though, Cor's account of life there did not provide a recommendation. Isaacson's involvement with the family is also evidenced by a visit to Jo's parents Joseph Jacob Isaacson, letter to Theo van Gogh and Jo Bonger-Van Gogh, 27 November 1889 (inv. no. b1901V1980, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam).

- 19 J. J. Isaacson, 'De revolutionaire schildersgroep in Frankrijk', *De Portefeuille: Kunst- en Letterbode* (10 May 1890), pp. 75–76: 'Pissarro's paintings among those of the dot [Pointillist] people, such as Seurat or Signac, still have a predominantly artistic value.' ('Pissarro's schilderijen tusschen die van de stippel-maar-raak-menschen, zooals Seurrat of Signac, hebben toch 'n overwegend artistiek valeur.')
- 20 J. J. Isaacson, 'Theodorus van Gogh', *De Portefeuille: Kunst- en Letterbode* (2 February 1891), pp. 573–74.
- 21 J. J. Isaacson, 'Aan mijn lezers', *De Portefeuille: Kunst- en Letterbode* (17 May 1891), p. 776.
- 22 J. J. Isaacson, Koninklijke Kunstzaal Kleykamp, The Hague, 6–27 April 1929.
- 23 Willem Steenhoff was positive about his use of colour but described his figures as being 'almost all drawn in a trivial manner' ('nagenoeg allemaal onbenullig getekend'). Willem Steenhoff, 'J. J. Isaacson', *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift* 77 (1929), pp. 436–37. Cornelis Veth writes about 'deeply felt and seasoned art' ('ernstig gevoelde en doorleefde kunst'). Cornelis Veth, 'In het Oostersche Droomland', *De Telegraaf* (23 April 1929).