



Figures by the Riverside
Emile Bernard (1868 - 1941), 1888



Idyll in Asnières (Idylle à Asnières)
Emile Bernard (1868 - 1941), 1888



Pasture with Figures and Animals
Emile Bernard (1868 - 1941), 1888

Works Collected by Theo and Vincent van Gogh

Drawings Sent to Van Gogh in September 1888

Emile Bernard

In late September 1888, Emile Bernard (1868–1941) dispatched a seemingly random selection of drawings to Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) from Pont-Aven. It was the fifth time that year that Bernard had sent one or more drawings to Arles. ⁰¹ This batch included two leisure scenes on the banks of the Seine at Asnières, a meadow with figures and animals at Pont-Aven, and a sheet with brothel scenes on both sides. ⁰² Van Gogh thanked Bernard for the drawings and paid him a compliment by acknowledging that each drawing contained ‘an idea’. ⁰³ Yet he also informed Bernard that he found the drawings had been ‘done in a bit too much of a rush’, and to Theo van Gogh (1857–1891) he wrote that he did not ‘like these drawings as much as the previous ones’. ⁰⁴ Van Gogh only adopted a critical and straightforward tone in his correspondence with Bernard. He regarded him as a kind of younger brother in need of advice and guidance and believed himself capable of offering that in view of his broader life experience and knowledge. ⁰⁵ Unfortunately, Bernard’s letters to Van Gogh have not survived, and therefore the exact reason for Bernard’s selection of these drawings remains unknown. It is worth noting that during the summer of 1888, Bernard worked extensively with watercolour, including many *plein-air* studies of the landscape. Interestingly, his shipments to Van Gogh only included drawings with figures, be it brothel drawings, depictions of rural life or religious scenes. ⁰⁶

Courbet and Seurat

The two scenes on the banks of the Seine can be interpreted within the context of the numerous brothel drawings Van Gogh had previously received from Bernard. As a counterpart to the many depictions of nocturnal prostitution on the fringes of society, these two sketches might represent a contrast – a depiction of more sophisticated courtesans who catered to their clients during the day. In this light, Gustave Courbet's (1819–1877) famous painting *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine (Summer)* (fig. 1) , for example, could have served as inspiration for Bernard's drawings.⁰⁷ In *Idyll in Asnières (Idylle à Asnières)*, we observe a fashionably dressed woman enjoying a picnic with her companion. Meanwhile, in the foreground of *Figures by the Riverside* we encounter a man and a woman whose attire more properly belongs in a café-concert or brothel setting and who may also be involved in a sex worker and client relationship.⁰⁸



Gustave Courbet, *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine (Summer)*, 1857, oil on canvas, 174 × 206 cm, Petit Palais, Paris

However, a more plausible interpretation is that the two leisure scenes were adapted from *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte — 1884* by Georges Seurat (1859–1891) (fig. 2) .⁰⁹ Bernard likely had the opportunity to see the monumental neo-impressionist work at the second exhibition of the Société des Artistes Indépendants, which took place from 21 August to 21 September 1886.¹⁰ The park-like setting along the bank of the Seine, with figures randomly scattered throughout the composition, is reminiscent of Seurat. The most notable stylistic similarity is the simplified and archaic appearance of the figures. As in Seurat's work, Bernard's figures have a static quality, with their forms reduced to the essence. The woman in the yellow dress, in particular, bears a striking resemblance to the figure in Seurat's large painting, although the other figures also exhibit similarities. While Bernard had been sketching leisure activities along the Seine near Asnières for years, there is little doubt that in this case he was inspired by the neo-impressionist.¹¹

Despite Bernard's evident admiration for Seurat's composition and figure stylization, he held a critical stance towards Seurat's pointillist painting technique. Bernard himself experimented with this technique for a brief period, but ultimately rejected it in early 1887. Later that same year, he even refused to exhibit alongside the neo-impressionist Paul Signac (1863–1935).¹² Even so, Bernard remained captivated by Seurat's work, albeit in a more selective way. While he was averse to the pointillist technique, Bernard still found value in Seurat's formal language. Consequently, Bernard drew his Seurat-inspired figures not as constellations of dots but as uniform fields of colour, accentuated with bold black contours.

Sheets torn from a sketchbook

When in 1888 Bernard drew his two leisure scenes cannot be determined with certainty. It is possible that he drew them on the spot in Asnières before his departure for Brittany in April. However, it is more likely that he made them during his stay in Brittany. An important clue supporting this is that Bernard executed these drawings on the same sheets of paper as the Au bordel series, which he produced towards the end of the summer. He tore them out of a sketchbook with sheets of wove paper measuring approximately 40.5 × 27.5 cm. The sheet with the drawing *Pasture with Figures and Animals*, which Bernard sent to Van Gogh along with the two leisure scenes, comes from this sketchbook as well. ¹³

The watercolour Bernard applied to *Figures by the Riverside* was less diluted than that in the other two drawings. This distinction is clear to see when comparing the colour intensity of the works. This difference has become more pronounced over time owing to the discolouration process, as diluted watercolour contains fewer pigments and tends to fade more rapidly. For example, the grass in *Idyll in Asnières (Idylle à Asnières)* has lost much of its original colour, and the hill in the right background of *Pasture with Figures and Animals* initially had a red hue. It is evident that Bernard handled this drawing before the watercolour had completely dried, as indicated by the many fingerprints along the left side of the sheet. Additionally, his fingerprints are visible at the lower left in *Figures by the Riverside*: a personal imprint, a fine trace of the artist. ¹⁴

The Pardon

Bernard took up *Figures by the Riverside* again when he worked on his important painting *The Pardon* (fig. 3) . In fact, he incorporated one of the two fashionably dressed women sitting in the grass in the drawing into the painting. The decision to use a drawing that may not have directly served as a preliminary study for the work in question could have been influenced by Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), who was in Pont-Aven with Bernard at the time. Indeed, Gauguin often scrolled back through his sketchbooks while painting, seeking figures that he could use in his compositions.¹⁵ However, in contrast to Gauguin's use of figures, Bernard's approach was more radical. By placing the Parisian women among traditionally dressed Breton people in *The Pardon*, Bernard removed them entirely from their original context. This unexpected confrontation served to highlight the stark contrast between 'modern' Paris and 'primitive' Pont-Aven.¹⁶ At the same time, Bernard drew attention to the total freedom that his approach to this painting afforded him. The green plane in which the figures are situated is essentially abstract, devoid of any specific guidelines or rules. As a result, the combination of figures in this space is essentially arbitrary, offering the artist the liberty of arranging and filling it as he saw fit. Gauguin, in turn, was inspired by this radical combination of figures, evident in his *The Wine Harvest: Human Misery* (1888, Ordrupgaard), painted in Arles, in which he integrated two Breton women in a scene he had observed there.¹⁷



Vincent van Gogh, *The Pardon* (copy after Emile Bernard), 1888, pencil and watercolour on paper, 47.5 × 62 cm, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan. Photo: Copyright Comune di Milano - all rights reserved - Milan, Galleria d'Arte Moderna / photo: Saporetto Immagini d'Arte

Once he had completed the figures in *The Pardon*, Bernard no longer needed the drawing and sent it to Van Gogh. Shortly thereafter, Van Gogh had the opportunity to see the final painting when Gauguin brought it with him to Arles to work with Van Gogh.¹⁸ Van Gogh was extremely enthusiastic about *The Pardon* and made a watercolour copy of it (fig. 4) .¹⁹ It is doubtful that he would have recognized the figures from the drawing in Bernard's painting; after all, he had sent the drawing on to Theo in Paris fairly soon after receiving it, which was before Gauguin arrived with *The Pardon*. But a year later, Van Gogh described Bernard's painting as 'a Sunday afternoon in Brittany', no doubt alluding to Seurat's masterpiece. In a letter addressed to his sister Willemien van Gogh (1862–1941), Van Gogh provided an even more detailed description of the work: 'Breton peasant women, children, peasants, dogs strolling in a very green meadow, the costumes are black and red, and big white caps. But in this crowd there are also two ladies, one in red, the other in bottle green, who make it into a really modern thing.'²⁰ Without mentioning the drawing further, Van Gogh recognized Bernard's radical choice to bring together types from different backgrounds in a composition.

The sketch *Pasture with Figures and Animals* also contributed to *The Pardon*. Even more than *Figures by the Riverside*, this sketch was an exploratory study for the painting. We recognize the Breton woman at the lower right of the composition, but the man opposite her does not occur in the painting. However, his clothing - characterized by a high white collar and a flat black hat, which is the traditional costume worn to a *pardon* (a Breton ritual in which penitents process barefoot or on their knees around the church to earn absolution for their sins), does feature in the painting, donned by the men at the upper right. Bernard did not incorporate anything else from the drawing in the painting. It was mainly an exploration of the prominent figures at the lower right of the composition. The sharp cropping ensures that the figures are only seen from the shoulders.

It is possible that Bernard chose *Figures by the Riverside* and *Pasture with Figures and Animals* to provide Van Gogh with an impression of his work in Pont-Aven. This selection of drawings may therefore not have been as random as it may initially appear. Van Gogh had previously requested drawings from Bernard that would give him an idea of the paintings he was producing.²¹ Essentially, Bernard was responding to Van Gogh's request with these two drawings.

Joost van der Hoeven
November 2023

Citation

Joost van der Hoeven, 'Drawings Sent to Van Gogh in September 1888', catalogue entry in *Contemporaries of Van Gogh 1: Works Collected by Theo and Vincent*, Joost van der Hoeven (ed.), Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2023.

[↗ doi.org/10.58802/FXQQ3161](https://doi.org/10.58802/FXQQ3161)

This contribution is licensed under a [↗ CC BY-NC-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) licence.

 Copy citation



Object details

Figures by the Riverside

Artist

Emile Bernard (1868 - 1941)

Date

1888

Medium

reed pen and brush and synthetic ink and transparent watercolour on wove paper

Dimensions

32 cm x 26 cm

Inventory Number

d0649V1962

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Idyll in Asnières (Idylle à Asnières)

Artist

Emile Bernard (1868 - 1941)

Date

1888

Medium

brush and black ink and synthetic opaque watercolour on wove paper

Dimensions

27.5 cm x 40.4 cm

Inscriptions

E. Bernard.

Idylle a Asnières

Inventory Number

d0635V1962

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

Pasture with Figures and Animals

Artist

Emile Bernard (1868 - 1941)

Date

1888

Medium

transparent watercolour on wove paper

Dimensions

26.4 cm x 40.4 cm

Inventory Number

d0648V1962

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Provenance

Figures by the Riverside

Sent by the artist from Pont-Aven to Vincent van Gogh, Arles; received by him on or shortly before 25 September 1888; sent by Vincent van Gogh to his brother Theo van Gogh, Paris, late September or early October 1888; 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; transferred by Vincent Willem van Gogh, Laren to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, 10 July 1962 (ratified 28 December 1970); agreement concluded between the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the State of the Netherlands, in which the preservation and management of the collection, and its placing in the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, to be realized in Amsterdam, is entrusted to the State, 21 July 1962; on permanent loan to the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh from the opening of the museum on 2 June 1973, and at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, since 1 July 1994.



Provenance

Idyll in Asnières (Idylle à Asnières)

Sent by the artist from Pont-Aven to Vincent van Gogh, Arles; received by him on or shortly before 25 September 1888; sent by Vincent van Gogh to his brother Theo van Gogh, Paris, late September or early October 1888; 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; transferred by Vincent Willem van Gogh, Laren to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, 10 July 1962 (ratified 28 December 1970); agreement concluded between the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the State of the Netherlands, in which the preservation and management of the collection, and its placing in the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, to be realized in Amsterdam, is entrusted to the State, 21 July 1962; on permanent loan to the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh from the opening of the museum on 2 June 1973, and at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, since 1 July 1994.



Provenance

Pasture with Figures and Animals

Sent by the artist from Pont-Aven to Vincent van Gogh, Arles; received by him on or shortly before 25 September 1888; sent by Vincent van Gogh to his brother Theo van Gogh, Paris, late September or early October 1888; 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; transferred by Vincent Willem van Gogh, Laren to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, 10 July 1962 (ratified 28 December 1970); agreement concluded between the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the State of the Netherlands, in which the preservation and management of the collection, and its placing in the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, to be realized in Amsterdam, is entrusted to the State, 21 July 1962; on permanent loan to the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh from the opening of the museum on 2 June 1973, and at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, since 1 July 1994.



Exhibitions

Figures by the Riverside

Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, April-May 1960

Mannheim, Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, *Emile Bernard 1868-1941. A Pioneer of Modern Art*, 12 May-5 August 1990, no. 52, *Porträt der Großmutter des Künstlers*

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, *Emile Bernard*, 24 August-4 November 1990, no. 90, *Figures by the Riverside*

Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, *Van Gogh and the Avant-Garde. The Modern Landscape*, 14 May-4 September 2023

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Van Gogh aan de Seine*, 13 October 2023-14 January 2024



Exhibitions

Idyll in Asnières (Idylle à Asnières)

Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, April-May 1960

Mannheim, Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, *Emile Bernard 1868-1941. A Pioneer of Modern Art*, 12 May-5 August 1990, no. 52, *Porträt der Großmutter des Künstlers*

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, *Emile Bernard*, 24 August-4 November 1990, no. 92, *Idyll at Asnières*

Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, *Van Gogh and the Avant-Garde. The Modern Landscape*, 14 May-4 September 2023

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Van Gogh aan de Seine*, 13 October 2023-14 January 2024



Exhibitions

Pasture with Figures and Animals

Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, April-May 1960

London, Tate Gallery, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven group*, 7 January-13 February 1966, no. 115, *Landscape with Figures*

Zurich, Kunsthaus Zürich, *Pont-Aven. Gauguin und sein Kreis in der Bretagne*, 5 March-11 April 1966, no. 130, *Landschaft mit Figuren*



Literature

Figures by the Riverside

- Emile Bernard (ed.), *Lettres de Vincent van Gogh à Emile Bernard*, Paris 1911, pp. 121, 124
- Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and French Painting of the 1880s: A Catalogue Raisonné of Key Works*, Ann Arbor, MI 1970, p. 224
- Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and the Impressionist Circle*, London 1970, p. 88
- Evert van Uiter and Michael Hoyle (eds.), *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, no. 2.43, p. 373
- Ellen Wardwell Lee et al. (eds.), *Neo-Impressionisten: Seurat tot Struycken*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), Amsterdam & Zwolle 1988, no. 38, p. 87
- Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, *Emile Bernard (1868-1941): The Theme of Bordellos and Prostitutes in Turn-of-the-Century French Art*, exh. cat., New Brunswick, NJ (Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), New Brunswick, NJ 1988, pp. 14-16
- Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *Emile Bernard, 1868-1941: A Pioneer of Modern Art / Ein Wegbereiter der Moderne*, exh. cat., Mannheim (Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), Zwolle 1990, no. 91, pp. 240-41
- Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker (eds.), *Vincent van Gogh, Painted with Words: The Letters to Émile Bernard*, exh. cat., New York (The Morgan Library & Museum) 2007, no. 76, pp. 283, 287, 366
- Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker (eds.), *Vincent van Gogh - The Letters: The Complete Illustrated and Annotated Edition*, 6 vols., Amsterdam, The

Hague & Brussels 2009, vol. 4: *Arles, 1888-1889*, nos. 687, 690, 696, pp. 284, 290, 306-7

- Fred Leeman, *Émile Bernard (1868-1941)*, Paris 2013, pp. 136-37
- Bregje Gerritse and Jacquelyn N. Coutré (eds.), *Van Gogh and the Avant-Garde: Along the Seine*, exh. cat. Chicago (Art Institute of Chicago) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), Chicago, Amsterdam & New Haven 2023, pp. 148-149



Literature

Idyll in Asnières (Idylle à Asnières)

- Emile Bernard (ed.), *Lettres de Vincent van Gogh à Emile Bernard*, Paris 1911, pp. 121, 124
- Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and French Painting of the 1880s: A Catalogue Raisonné of Key Works*, Ann Arbor, MI 1970, p. 224
- Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and the Impressionist Circle*, London 1970, p. 88
- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle (eds.), *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, no. 2.40, p. 372
- Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, *Emile Bernard (1868-1941): The Theme of Bordellos and Prostitutes in Turn-of-the-Century French Art*, exh. cat., New Brunswick, NJ (Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), New Brunswick, NJ 1988, pp. 14-16
- Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *Emile Bernard, 1868-1941: A Pioneer of Modern Art / Ein Wegbereiter der Moderne*, exh. cat., Mannheim (Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), Zwolle 1990, no. 92, pp. 240-41
- Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker (eds.), *Vincent van Gogh, Painted with Words: The Letters to Émile Bernard*, exh. cat., New York (The Morgan Library & Museum) 2007, pp. 226, 231, 290, 297, 366
- Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker (eds.), *Vincent van Gogh - The Letters: The Complete Illustrated and Annotated Edition*, 6 vols., Amsterdam, The Hague & Brussels 2009, vol. 4: *Arles, 1888-1889*, nos. 687, 690, 696, pp. 284, 290, 306-7



Literature

Pasture with Figures and Animals

- Emile Bernard (ed.), *Lettres de Vincent van Gogh à Emile Bernard*, Paris 1911, pp. 121, 124
- Denys Sutton and Gabriel White, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven Group*, exh. cat., London (Tate Gallery) 1966, no. 115, pp. 33–34
- Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and French Painting of the 1880s: A Catalogue Raisonné of Key Works*, Ann Arbor, MI 1970, p. 224
- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle (eds.), *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, no. 2.42, p. 373
- Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, *Emile Bernard (1868–1941): The Theme of Bordellos and Prostitutes in Turn-of-the-Century French Art*, exh. cat., New Brunswick, NJ (Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), New Brunswick, NJ 1988, pp. 14–16
- Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker (eds.), *Vincent van Gogh, Painted with Words: The Letters to Émile Bernard*, exh. cat., New York (The Morgan Library & Museum) 2007, pp. 226, 231, 290, 297, 366
- Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker (eds.), *Vincent van Gogh – The Letters: The Complete Illustrated and Annotated Edition*, Amsterdam, The Hague & Brussels 2009, vol. 4: *Arles, 1888–1889*, nos. 687, 690, 696, pp. 284, 290, 306–7
- Bregje Gerritse and Jacquelyn N. Coutré (eds.), *Van Gogh and the Avant-Garde: Along the Seine*, exh. cat. Chicago (Art Institute of Chicago) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), Chicago, Amsterdam & New Haven 2023, p. 148



Letters

Figures by the Riverside

- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 25 September 1888 [↗ 687](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, between 27 September and 1 October 1888 [↗ 690](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, 3 October 1888 [↗ 696](#).



Letters

Idyll in Asnières (Idylle à Asnières)

- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 25 September 1888 [↗ 687](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, between 27 September and 1 October 1888 [↗ 690](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, 3 October 1888 [↗ 696](#).



Letters

Pasture with Figures and Animals

- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 25 September 1888 [↗ 687](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, between 27 September and 1 October 1888 [↗ 690](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, 3 October 1888 [↗ 696](#).

Figures



Fig. 1
Gustave Courbet, *Young Ladies on the Banks of the Seine (Summer)*, 1857, oil on canvas, 174 × 206 cm, Petit Palais, Paris



Fig. 2
Georges Seurat, *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte — 1884*, 1884–86, oil on canvas, 207.5 × 308.1 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection



Fig. 3
Emile Bernard, *The Pardon*, 1888, oil on canvas, 73 × 92 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Photo: RMN-Grand Palais / Patrice Schmidt



Fig. 4

Vincent van Gogh, *The Pardon (copy after Emile Bernard)*, 1888, pencil and watercolour on paper, 47.5 × 62 cm, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan. Photo: Copyright Comune di Milano - all rights reserved - Milan, Galleria d'Arte Moderna / photo: Saporetto Immagini d'Arte

Footnotes

- 01 Bernard sent drawings to Van Gogh a total of six times.
- 02 For the two-sided brothel drawing, see *Sketches of Prostitutes (recto), Brothel Scene (verso)* in **Brothel Scenes**.
- 03 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, between 27 September and 1 October 1888 [↗ \[690\]](#): 'I find them done in a bit too much of a rush, and I like the two drawings of whores the most; but there's an idea in all of them.' ('Je les trouve un peu trop faits à la hâte et j'aime le mieux les deux dessins des putains, d'ailleurs il y a une idee dans tous.')
- 04 Ibid.; Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 25 September 1888 [↗ \[687\]](#): 'J'aime toutefois pas autant ces dessins-ci que les précédents.'
- 05 See Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker (eds.), *Vincent van Gogh, Painted with Words: The Letters to Émile Bernard*, exh. cat., New York (The Morgan Library & Museum) 2007, p. 11.
- 06 Many of these sheets are in the Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art and in various private collections.
- 07 Bernard might have seen the painting during the major monographic exhibition of Courbet's work at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in May 1882. See *Exposition des œuvres de Gustave Courbet à l'École des Beaux-Arts*, Paris 1882, no. 10.
- 08 The clothing of these figures corresponds to the way Bernard depicted prostitutes and their clientele in the Brothel Scenes. For example, we see the outfit of the man in shirt sleeves and waistcoat in the drawing *This is the Tomb of My Dreams (Vla l'tombeau de mes rêves)* from the series *Au Bordel*, and the low-cut, sleeveless top with long skirt is worn by several prostitutes in *Au bordel*.
- 09 This comparison was first noted by Mary Anne Stevens. See Mary Anne Stevens (ed.), *Emile Bernard, 1868-1941: A Pioneer of Modern Art / Ein Wegbereiter der Moderne*, exh. cat., Mannheim (Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), Zwolle 1990, p. 241
- 10 It is possible that Bernard returned from Brittany that year just in time. He had already expressed an interest in seeing the Eighth Impressionist Exhibition in May and June 1886, thus it is plausible that he took the trouble to actually visit it. See Emile Bernard, letter to his parents, 30 May 1886, in Laure Harscoët-Maire, 'Lettres d'Émile Bernard (1886): de Cancale à Saint-Briac', *Le pays de Dinan* 17 (1997), p. 120.
- 11 The album *L'enfance d'un peintre* (Kunsthalle Bremen - Der Kunstverein in Bremen), in which Bernard compiled many of his early drawings in later life, includes some early sketches depicting recreational scenes along the Seine. See also Joost van der Hoeven, 'Bernard and Asnières: Backdrop for a Stormy Beginning', in Bregje Gerritse and Jacquelyn N. Coutré (eds.), *Van Gogh and the Avant-Garde: Along the Seine*, exh. cat., Chicago (Art Institute of Chicago) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), Chicago, Amsterdam & New Haven 2023, pp. 130-51.
- 12 Regarding his rejection of neo-impressionism, see Emile Bernard, *L'aventure de ma vie*, unpublished manuscript, c. 1939, Bibliothèque de l'INHA, Paris, BCMN Ms 374, p. 31; regarding his unwillingness to exhibit alongside Signac: Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, about December 1887 [↗ \[575\]](#).

- 13 After the drawing was completed, an approximately 8.5 cm strip was torn off from the top of the sheet. It can be seen that the drawing runs to the edge. The sheet was subsequently folded and torn along that fold line. However, this did not turn out equally well everywhere, and the protruding part can also be seen to have been painted. With thanks to Nico Lingbeek, paper conservator, Van Gogh Museum, 22 October 2021.
- 14 With thanks to Nico Lingbeek, paper conservator, Van Gogh Museum, 22 October 2021.
- 15 For example, for the painting *Breton Women at the Turn* (1888, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek), Gauguin used a sketch from 1886. See Daniel Wildenstein, Sylvie Crussard and Martine Heudron, *Gauguin: premier itinéraire d'un sauvage: catalogue de l'œuvre peint (1873-1888)*, 2 vols., Milan 2001, vol. 2, no. 271, pp. 379-80.
- 16 See Fred Leeman, *Émile Bernard (1868-1941)*, Paris 2013, p. 136.
- 17 Paul Gauguin, letter to Emile Bernard, second week of November 1888, in Victor Merlhès (ed.), *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin: documents, témoignages: tome premier, 1873-1888*, Paris 1984, no. 179: 'It is an effect of vines that I saw in Arles. I added some Breton women. So much for *exactitude*' ('C'est un effet de vignes que j'ai vu à Arles. J'y ai mis des Bretonnes. Tant pis pour *l'exactitude*').
- 18 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 25 October 1888 [↗ \[712\]](#): 'Gauguin has brought a magnificent canvas that he exchanged with Bernard, Breton women in a green meadow.' ('Gauguin a apporté une magnifique toile qu'il a échangé avec Bernard, des Bretonnes dans un pré vert.')
- 19 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 25 September 1888 [↗ \[687\]](#): 'I'll send you five drawings by Bernard, of the same kind as the others.' ('Je t'enverrai cinq dessins de Bernard dans le genre des autres.')
- 20 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Willemien van Gogh, 9 or 10 December 1889 [↗ \[827\]](#): 'des paysannes bretonnes, des enfants, des paysans, des chiens préambulent dans une prairie très verte, les costumes sont noires et rouges et des grandes coiffes blanches. Mais il y a dans cette foule aussi deux dames, l'une en rouge, l'autre en vert bouteille, qui en font une chose bien moderne.' See Douglas W. Druick, Britt Salvesen and Peter Zegers, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South*, exh. cat., Chicago (Art Institute of Chicago) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), New York 2001, p. 223.
- 21 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, 15 July 1888 [↗ \[641\]](#).