



Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin, 1888

Works Collected by Theo and Vincent van Gogh

Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin

Emile Bernard

In mid-September 1888, Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) asked Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) and Emile Bernard (1868–1941) – both then staying in Brittany, in the artists' village of Pont-Aven – to paint portraits of each other to exchange for paintings of his.⁰¹ With this request, Van Gogh unwittingly put a strain on the relations between his French friends. After all, the young Bernard was so much in awe of the older painter – his senior by twenty years – that he felt incapable of painting a portrait that could measure up to anything Gauguin might produce. As Vincent wrote to his brother Theo: 'His [Bernard's] letter is full of veneration for Gauguin's talent – he says that he finds him so great an artist that it almost frightens him, and he finds everything that he, Bernard, does, bad in comparison with Gauguin.'⁰² So Bernard refused to portray Gauguin: he did not feel up to the task; it was as simple as that.⁰³

Van Gogh's initial indignation

Van Gogh was very disappointed by this news, and he told Bernard so in no uncertain terms: 'but what surprises me a little is to hear you say, "Oh, no way of doing Gauguin's portrait!" Why no way? That's all rubbish.'⁰⁴ This outburst may have been prompted by Van Gogh's feeling that Gauguin and Bernard were not making good use of their time together. He thought it only natural for artist friends to seize the opportunity to paint from a model simply by posing for one another. Alone in Arles and frustrated by the lack of models, Van Gogh no doubt felt very lonely. Having portraits of Gauguin and Bernard on the wall might alleviate his solitude.⁰⁵ Disgruntled, he wrote to Bernard: 'Here you have portraitists, living for so long side by side and they don't agree on posing for each other and they'll separate without having portrayed each other.'⁰⁶ Van Gogh was certain that he would welcome any opportunity to paint portraits of Gauguin or Bernard.⁰⁷ The only result of such resolve, however, was a small portrait of Gauguin, whom he timidly portrayed diagonally from the back (fig. 1) .



Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Gauguin*, 1888, oil on canvas, 38.2 × 33.8 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Van Gogh tried to lend weight to his plea for an exchange of paintings by referring to a practice said to be common among Japanese artists: 'For a long time I've been touched by the fact that Japanese artists very often made exchanges among themselves. It clearly proves that they liked one another and stuck together, and that there was a certain harmony among them and that they did indeed live a kind of brotherly life, in a natural way and not in the midst of intrigues. The more we resemble them in that respect, the better it will be for us.'⁰⁸ Van Gogh was willing to send Bernard quite a few of his recently painted 'studies', but he expected something substantial in return.⁰⁹ Portraits of the friends he missed so much would therefore be very welcome, but Bernard's initial refusal dashed his hopes of an exchange.¹⁰

Self-portraits instead of portraits of one another

Van Gogh was therefore surprised to receive a letter on 1 October 1888 informing him that Bernard and Gauguin had painted self-portraits, each of which included a small, schematic portrait of the other.¹¹ When the portraits arrived on 4 or 5 October, Van Gogh was disappointed by Gauguin's self-portrait but very positive about Bernard's. He wrote to Theo: 'but I myself like Bernard's very much, it's nothing but an idea of a painter, some cursory tones, some blackish lines, but it's as stylish as real, real Manet'.¹²

Van Gogh praised the portrait for its simplicity and directness, which he thought typical of the portraiture of Edouard Manet (1832–1883). Portraits by Manet that Van Gogh could have seen at the 1873 Salon, such as *Le Bon Bock* (fig. 2) , did in fact possess these qualities.¹³ In that portrayal of a drinker, Manet placed his model in front of a uniform background, just as Bernard portrayed himself against a backdrop of monochrome blue. In addition, the model in Manet's portrait is depicted in a very direct way, in an apparently simple and spontaneous technique, which Van Gogh also recognized in the self-portrait of Bernard. Of particular importance to Van Gogh were the 'blackish lines' (*traits noirâtres*). Manet was known to be very skilled at painting in black tones. Although it is evident that Bernard's style differed from Manet's, Van Gogh detected this characteristic of Manet's style in Bernard's self-portrait, which does in fact display thick, deep blue, nearly black lines.

Bernard painted these broad, dark blue lines as the finishing touch over previous layers of paint to accentuate the contours.¹⁴ This choice defined the painting, giving it a naïve and cloisonné-like appearance. Close observation of these lines shows that the dark blue occasionally blends with the lighter colours of Bernard's face and hat, which means that those paint layers were not yet completely dry when he added the finishing touches.¹⁵ This points to a rapid manner of working, which distinguishes Bernard's canvas from Gauguin's meticulously executed self-portrait.

Painting technique

For these works Bernard and Gauguin used the same canvas, with the same measurements and the same ground. To the cotton canvas they applied a very thin layer of ground consisting of chalk, plaster and animal glue. Bernard and Gauguin knew that this canvas and the type of ground they used would promote the absorption of oil from the oil paint, which was essential for the matte surface they were striving to create.¹⁶ Bernard then applied a sketch of his composition to the thin ground layer with a fine brush and diluted dark blue paint.¹⁷ X-radiographs of the portrait show that the background initially included two different rectangular shapes, which have been painted over.¹⁸ In the end Bernard decided to paint the schematic portrait of Gauguin and the Japanese print in the lower right corner over the light blue paint layer before it was at all dry.¹⁹ As a result, the light blue shines through both passages.²⁰ Interestingly, he placed Gauguin in the middle of the composition – perhaps as a token of esteem for the older ‘head’ of the school of Pont-Aven – whereas Gauguin stuck Bernard at the right edge of his self-portrait. All in all, it seems that Bernard struggled with the design of this composition.

Bernard’s signature and his dedication to Van Gogh – in which the spelling of ‘copaing’ (‘pal’) jokingly refers to the dialect of Provence – were also clearly applied wet-in-wet.²¹ For his own portrait, Bernard left a reserve in the blue, which can be gleaned from the unpainted edges of the ground layer that appear in several places along the contours of his figure, such as the right-hand edge of the hat’s brim.²²

Even though Bernard seems to have been unsure about certain parts of his composition, the fact that a number of passages were painted wet-in-wet indicates that he worked rather quickly. His relatively spontaneous manner of painting resembles Van Gogh’s more than Gauguin’s.²³ This might explain Van Gogh’s preference for the self-portrait of the younger painter. Still, he did not go into detail when he complimented Bernard personally on his portrait: ‘As for your portrait – you know – I like it very much – actually I like everything that you do, as you know – and perhaps nobody before me has liked what you do as much as I do.’²⁴

Simplifying the scene

Van Gogh had become well acquainted with the 'naïve', 'primitive' style that had increasingly come to characterize Bernard's work in 1888. The large number of drawings that the artists exchanged that year allowed them to keep close track of each other's developments. Inspired not only by medieval tapestries and stained glass but also by Japanese prints, Bernard sought to simplify the line, form and colour in his work. He did this by reducing his subject to its essence, or, as he himself expressed it: 'One must simplify the scene to make sense of it.' Bernard had done exactly this with himself in this simple, unpretentious self-portrait. Van Gogh therefore saw the work as 'nothing but an idea of a painter'.²⁶

Japanese prints

The Japanese print in the lower right corner is an addition that can be seen primarily as a gesture: as Bernard reaching out to Van Gogh. After all, Japanese prints played an important role in the relations between these two artists. As Bernard later wrote in his preface to the 1911 edition of the correspondence between Van Gogh and himself, they had ‘come up with this project to draw the same way one writes and with the same facility that a Hokusai or an Utamaro had. We were, one must admit, devotees of Japanese imagery.’²⁸ Van Gogh and Bernard fell under the spell of Japanese prints after Van Gogh’s purchase in the winter of 1886–87 of more than 600 woodcuts from the print dealer Siegfried Bing.²⁹ Van Gogh’s reason for this acquisition was originally commercial, since he hoped to make a profit by reselling the prints individually. The sale exhibition he organized at the Café Le Tambourin ended in failure, and he was stuck with a large quantity of prints.³⁰ In later articles Bernard wrote that the apartment Vincent shared with Theo was completely littered with Japanese prints.³¹ Bernard saw how Van Gogh had decorated the background of *Portrait of Père Tanguy* (1887, Musée Rodin, Paris) with Japanese prints and was probably aware of Van Gogh’s direct copies after the work of Eisen and Hiroshige.³² He received a number of Japanese prints from Van Gogh’s collection as a gift or in exchange for paintings.³³ Just before Vincent left Paris, the two friends apparently filled the walls of his studio with Japanese prints so that Theo would think he was still around.³⁴ In Van Gogh’s first letter to Bernard from Arles, Japan and Japanese prints were the first things he mentioned.³⁵

In short, Bernard understood the importance of Japanese prints to Van Gogh and their friendship, and so he probably used one of the prints he had received from his friend in the self-portrait he made for him. The gradual transition from yellow to red in the horizon, the image of a billowing sail and the inclusion of a red *cartouche* all indicate that Bernard used an example by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858).³⁶ Van Gogh had a large number of prints by this artist and he may well have given a few to Bernard. Hiroshige’s numerous series of prints depicting the fifty-three stations on the Tōkaidō road contain at least three sheets that correspond to Bernard’s depiction: *Arai: View of the Mile-and-a-Half Sea Ferry* (fig. 3) , *Arai: The Checkpoint* (fig. 4) and *Kuwana: The Ferries of Shichiri* (fig. 5) . It must be borne in mind, however, that Bernard moved the red *cartouche*, which is to be found at the upper right in all these works, to the upper left corner of the print, perhaps in order to preserve this characteristic element of the print and to feature it in his own work.



Utagawa Hiroshige, *Arai: View of the Mile-and-a-Half Sea Ferry*, no. 32 from the series *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road (Gyōsho Tōkaidō)*, 1841–44, colour woodblock print, 20.8 cm × 33.3 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William S. and John T. Spaulding Collection. Photo: © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

No matter which print served as the source, it was a meaningful gesture on the part of Bernard to incorporate in his self-portrait a print that he had probably received from Van Gogh, not only because his relationship with Van Gogh was inextricably tied to Japanese prints but also because examples of such art had contributed to the cloisonné-like style in which Bernard painted his self-portrait.

The exchange

In contrast to Gauguin, who received a self-portrait in exchange for his own self-portrait, Bernard received a river view, *Quay with Men Unloading Sand Barges* (fig. 6) .³⁸ Perhaps Bernard did not receive a self-portrait of Van Gogh because he already had one: in Paris, he had exchanged a portrait he had painted of his grandmother for Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* (1887, Detroit Institute of Arts).³⁹ In any case, Van Gogh had no other self-portraits available at that time. The dedication to Bernard in the lower right corner of *Quay with Men Unloading Sand Barges* is almost completely faded, as is also the case with the dedication on the self-portrait that Van Gogh had intended for Gauguin.⁴⁰



Vincent van Gogh, *Quay with Men Unloading Sand Barges*, 1888, oil on canvas, 55.1 × 66.2 cm, Museum Folkwang, Essen. Photo: Museum Folkwang Essen / ARTOTHEK

Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin is the last painting that Van Gogh received from Bernard; after this trade, their exchange of works came to a halt. Even though Bernard wrote repeatedly about Van Gogh after his friend's death in 1890, he never said a word about the self-portrait. Bernard's later accounts of the months he spent with Gauguin in Pont-Aven in 1888 were, without exception, dominated by the notorious discussion about what in his view was the unjust honour later accorded to Gauguin as the 'inventor' of symbolism in painting, and thus he unfortunately never recorded his recollections of this self-portrait. Bernard did write, however, about the *Quay with Men Unloading Sand Barges* in a letter to his father in 1900: 'I cherish it as a souvenir of friendship as much as of painting.'⁴¹ As a tribute to Van Gogh, he included the work – in mirror image – in the background of another self-portrait, which he made in 1892.⁴²

Joost van der Hoeven
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Object details

Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin

Artist

Emile Bernard (1868 - 1941)

Location

Pont-Aven

Date

1888

Medium

oil on canvas

Dimensions

46 cm x 56 cm

Inscriptions

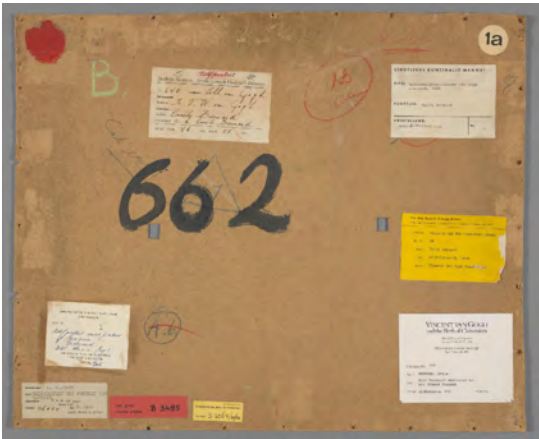
Emile Bernard 1888
a son copaing Vincent

Inventory Number

s0206V1962

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin

Front & Back



Provenance

Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin

Exchanged by the artist, Pont-Aven, with Vincent van Gogh, Arles, 4 or 5 October 1888; left by Vincent van Gogh at the apartment of his brother Theo van Gogh, Paris sent by Vincent van Gogh from Arles to his brother, Theo van Gogh, Paris, 30 April 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; transferred by Vincent Willem van Gogh, Laren, to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, 10 July 1962; 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

Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin

Amsterdam, 't Binnenhuis, *Tentoonstelling van moderne kunst. Georganiseerd ten bate van het Russische Roode Kruis*, 14 November-December 1915, *Zelfportret*

Antwerp, Zaal Comité voor Artistieke Werking, *Vincent van Gogh*, 7 May-19 June 1955, no. 13, *Zelfportret van Emile Bernard (met portret van Gauguin in de achtergrond)*

Mons, Museum voor Schoone Kunsten, *Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). Son art et ses amis*, 22 March-5 May 1958, no. 90, *autoportrait avec portret de Gauguin*

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, 29 January-29 February 1960, no. 7

Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, 12 March-29 May 1960, no. 7, *Zelfportret met portret van Gauguin*

Paris, Institut Néerlandais, *Les amis de Van Gogh*, 9 November-17 December 1960, no. 11, *Portrait par lui-même avec portrait de Gauguin*

Humblebaek, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, *Stedelijk Museum besøger Louisiana*, 28 October-3 December 1961

Stockholm, Moderna Museet, *Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam besöker Moderna Museet, Stockholm*, 26 December 1961-28 January 1962, no. 12, *Självporträtt med porträtt av Gauguin*

Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, *Die Nabis und ihre Freunde*, 23 October 1963-6 January 1964, no. 7, *Selbstbildnis, Vincent van Gogh gewidmet*

London, Tate Gallery, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven group*, 7 January-13 February 1966, no. 84, *Self-Portrait*

Zurich, Kunsthaus Zürich, *Pont-Aven : Gauguin und sein Kreis in der Bretagne*, 5 March-11 April 1966, no. 99, *Selbstporträt*

Bremen, Kunsthalle Bremen, *Emile Bernard 1868-1941 : peintures, dessins, gravures*, 5 February-2 April 1967, no. 20, *Selbstbildnis vor einem Bildnis Gauguins*

Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts (Lille), *Emile Bernard 1868-1941 : peintures, dessins, gravures*, 12 April-12 June 1967, no. 20, *Autoportrait au portrait de Gauguin*

Gothenburg, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, *Emile Bernard : målningar, akvareller, teckningar, grafik*, 13 December 1968-26 January 1969, no. 8, *Autoportrait au portrait de Gauguin*

Sophienholm-Kunstmuseum, *Emile Bernard : målningar, akvareller, teckningar, grafik*, 2 February-30 March 1969, no. 8, *Autoportrait au portrait de Gauguin*

Stockholm, Thielska Galleriet, *Emile Bernard : målningar, akvareller, teckningar, grafik*, 5 April-15 August 1969, no. 8, *Autoportrait au portrait de Gauguin*

Amsterdam, Museum Fodor, October-December 1969

Amsterdam, Museum Fodor, October-November 1970

London, Royal Academy of Arts, *Post-Impressionism. Cross-Currents in European Painting*, 17 November 1979-16 March 1980, no. 137, *Self-Portrait, for his Friend Vincent*

Washington, National Gallery of Art, *Post-Impressionism. Cross-Currents in European and American Painting 1880-1906*, 25 May-1 September 1980, no. 137, *Self-Portrait, for his Friend Vincent*

Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, *Vincent van Gogh and the Birth of Cloisonism*, 24 January-22 March 1981, no. 105, *Self-Portrait dedicated to Vincent*

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, *Van Gogh en zijn Franse vrienden. Het cloisonisme als stijl 1886-1891*, 9 April-14 June 1981, no. 105, *Self-Portrait dedicated to Vincent*

Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim, *Emile Bernard 1868-1941. A Pioneer of Modern Art*, 12 May-5 August 1990, no. 56, *Autoportrait, à son copain Vincent*

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, *Emile Bernard*, 24 August-4 November 1990, no. 56, *Autoportrait, à son copain Vincent*

Kyoto, National Museum of Modern Art (Kyoto), *Vincent van Gogh and Japan*, 18 February-29 March 1992, no. 45, *Self-portrait with Portrait of Gauguin*

Tokyo, Setagaya Art Museum, *Vincent van Gogh and Japan*, 4 April-24 May 1992, no. 45, *Self-portrait with Portrait of Gauguin*

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Theo van Gogh 1857-1891. Kunsthandelaar, verzamelaar en broer van Vincent*, 24 June-5 September 1999, no. 170, *Zelfportret met portret van Paul Gauguin*

Paris, Musée d'Orsay, *Theo van Gogh 1857-1891. Marchand de tableaux, collectionneur, frère de Vincent*, 27 September 1999-9 January 2000, no. 85, *Autoportrait avec le portrait de Gauguin*

Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, *Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Studio of the South*, 22 September 2001-13 January 2002, no. 27, *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Vincent van Gogh*

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Van Gogh en Gauguin. Het atelier van het zuiden*, 9 February-2 June 2002, no. 27, *Zelfportret opgedragen aan Vincent van Gogh*

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *De keuze van Vincent. Van Goghs Musée imaginaire*, 14 February-15 June 2003, no. 170, *Zelfportret met portret van Gauguin*

New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, *Painted with Words: Vincent van Gogh's letters to Emile Bernard*, 28 September 2007-6 January 2008, no. 73, *Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin*

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Van Goghs brieven. De kunstenaar aan het woord*, 9 October 2009-3 January 2010

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Van Gogh aan het werk*, 1 May 2013-13 January 2014, no. 240, *Zelfportret met portret van Gauguin*

Gothenburg, Göteborgs Konstmuseum, *Friction of Ideas: Gauguin, Van Gogh, Bernard*, 19 July-19 October 2014, no. 125, *Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin*

Paris, Musée de l'Orangerie, *Emile Bernard (1868 - 1941), la peinture en colère*, 16 September 2014-5 January 2015

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Van Gogh & Japan*, 24 March-24 June 2018



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 - Francesco Saracino, *Il consolatore dei moderni: Van Gogh e le metamorfosi di Gesù*, Terlizzi 2013, pp. 83-84; BVG22456
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 - Marije Vellekoop *et al.*, *Van Gogh at Work*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) 2013, pp. 177, 180, 275-79; BVG22408
 - Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark, *Van Gogh, Gauguin, Bernard: Friction of Ideas*, exh. cat., Charlottenlund (Ordrupgaard Museum) 2014, no. 125, pp. 98, 130, 139; BVG22741
 - Jean-Jacques Luthi and Armand Israël, *Émile Bernard: instigateur de l'école de Pont-Aven, précurseur de l'art moderne: sa vie, son œuvre: catalogue raisonné*, Paris 2014, no. 144, p. 161; BVG23554
 - Cornelia Homburg *et al.*, *Gauguin Portraits*, exh. cat., Ottawa (National Gallery of Canada) / London (National Gallery), New Haven & London 2019, p. 31; BVG25475
 - Esther Darley and Renske Suijver, *Masterpieces in the Van Gogh Museum*, Amsterdam 2019, p. 118; BVG25634 a-b
 - Flemming Friberg, *Gauguin: The Master, the Monster and the Myth*, Copenhagen 2023, p. 110; BVG26587



Letters

Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin

- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, c. 11 September 1888, [↗ 680](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 18 September 1888, [↗ 683](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, between 19 and 25 September 1888, [↗ 684](#);
- Paul Gauguin, letter to Vincent van Gogh, Pont-Aven, 26 September 1888, [↗ 688](#);
- Paul Gauguin, letter to Vincent van Gogh, Pont-Aven, 1 October 1888, [↗ 692](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 3 October 1888, [↗ 694](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, 3 October 1888, [↗ 696](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 4 or 5 October 1888, [↗ 697](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, c. 5 October 1888, [↗ 698](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 8 October 1888, [↗ 699](#);
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 30 April 1889, [↗ 765](#).

Figures



Fig. 1

Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Gauguin*, 1888, oil on canvas, 38.2 × 33.8 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Fig. 2

Edouard Manet, *Le Bon Bock*, 1873, oil on canvas, 94.6 × 83.3 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Mr and Mrs Carroll S. Tyson Jr, Collection, 1963



Fig. 3

Utagawa Hiroshige, *Arai: View of the Mile-and-a-Half Sea Ferry*, no. 32 from the series *The Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō Road (Gyōsho Tōkaidō)*, 1841–44, colour woodblock print, 20.8 cm × 33.3 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William S. and John T. Spaulding Collection. Photo: © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Fig. 4

Utagawa Hiroshige, *Arai: The Checkpoint*, no. 31 from the series *The Tōkaidō Road - The Fifty-three Stations (Tōkaidō - Gojūsan tsugi no uchi)*, 1850–51, colour woodblock print, 17.7 × 25.5 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection. Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Fig. 5

Utagawa Hiroshige, *Kuwana: The Ferries of Shichiri*, no. 43 from the series *Collection of Illustrations of Famous Places near the Fifty-Three Stations [along the Tōkaidō]*, 1855, colour woodblock print, 36 cm × 23 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Fig. 6
Vincent van Gogh, *Quay with Men Unloading Sand Barges*, 1888, oil on canvas, 55.1 × 66.2 cm, Museum Folkwang, Essen. Photo: Museum Folkwang Essen / ARTOTHEK



Footnotes

- 01 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, c. 11 September 1888 [↗ \[680\]](#): 'My letter to Gauguin has gone off; I asked them for an exchange if they wish; I would so much like to have here Gauguin's portrait of Bernard and Bernard's of Gauguin.' ('Ma lettre à Gauguin est partie, je leur ai demandé un échange s'ils veulent, j'aimerais tant avoir ici le portrait de Bernard par Gauguin et celui de Gauguin par Bernard.') Van Gogh's letter to Gauguin has not been preserved.
- 02 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 18 September 1888 [↗ \[683\]](#): 'Sa lettre est empreinte de vénération pour le talent de Gauguin - il dit qu'il le trouve un si grand artiste qu'il en a presque peur et qu'il trouve mauvais tout ce que lui, Bernard, fait en comparaison de Gauguin.'
- 03 Ibid.: 'But he said that he daren't do Gauguin, as I'd asked him, because he feels too shy with Gauguin.' ('Mais il a dit qu'il n'ose pas faire Gauguin comme je le lui avais demandé parce qu'il se sent trop timide devant Gauguin.')
- 04 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, between 19 and 25 September 1888 [↗ \[684\]](#): 'ce qui m'étonne un peu c'est de t'entendre dire "oh pour faire le portrait de Gauguin pas moyen!" Pourquoi pas moyen, bêtises tout cela.'
- 05 See, for example, Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 25 September 1888 [↗ \[687\]](#): 'I'm always frustrated in my best abilities by the lack of models' ('Je me trouve toujours frustré dans mes meilleures capacités par le manque de modèles').
- 06 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, between 19 and 25 September 1888 [↗ \[684\]](#): 'Voilà des portraitistes, cela vit si longtemps à côté l'un de l'autre et cela ne s'entend pas pour poser l'un pour l'autre et cela se separera sans s'être mutuellement pourtraicturé.'
- 07 Ibid.: 'So I really hope to do your portrait and Gauguin's myself one day, the first time we get together. Which is bound to happen.' ('J'espère bien un jour alors faire ton portrait et celui de Gauguin moi-même, la première fois que nous tomberons ensemble. ce qui ne peut manquer d'arriver.')
- 08 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, 3 October 1888 [↗ \[696\]](#): 'J'ai depuis longtemps été touché de ce que les artistes Japonais ont pratiqué tres [sic] souvent l'échange entre eux. Cela prouve bien qu'ils s'aimaient et se tenaient et qu'il y regnait une certaine harmonie entre eux et qu'ils vivaient justement dans une sorte de vie fraternelle naturellement et non pas dans les intrigues. Plus nous leur ressemblerons sous ce respect-là, mieux l'on s'en trouvera.'
- 09 Ibid.: 'Well, I'll be very very curious to see studies of Pont-Aven. But for yourself, give me something fairly worked up.' ('Eh bien je serai fort fort curieux de voir des etudes de Pont Aven. Mais pour toi donnes moi une chose un peu travaillée.')
- 10 Vincent van Gogh. letter to Emile Bernard, between 19 and 25 September 1888 [↗ \[684\]](#): 'Well! I'm not pressing the point. And I repeat, there's no longer a question of an exchange.' ('Bon! je n'insiste pas.- Et je le repète, il n'est plus question de l'échange.')
- 11 Paul Gauguin, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 1 October 1888 [↗ \[692\]](#): 'We've satisfied your desire; in a different way, it's true, but what does it matter, since the result is the same? Our 2 portraits.' ('Nous avons accompli votre désir, d'une autre façon il est vrai mais qu'importe puisque le résultat est le même. Nos 2 portraits.')

- 12 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 4 or 5 October 1888 [↗ \[697\]](#): ‘moi j’aime fort celui de Bernard, c’est rien qu’une idée de peintre, quelques tons sombres, quelques traits noirs mais c’est chic comme du vrai vrai Manet.’
- 13 See Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 13 June 1873 [↗ \[9\]](#); Salon catalogue no. 999, *Le Bon Bock*. See [↗ La Base Salons](#). It is remarkable that Van Gogh chose Manet as the basis of comparison for this work since he had not mentioned Manet’s portraiture in his correspondence since 1885. Moreover, it is not known if Van Gogh actually saw any of Manet’s portraits during his stay in Paris.
- 14 Devi Ormond and Nienke Bakker, ‘Van Gogh and his Pont-Aven Pals: A Comparative Study of their Painting Technique from the Second Half of September 1888’, in Marije Vellekoop *et al.* (eds.), *Van Gogh’s Studio Practice*, Amsterdam & Brussels 2013, p. 372.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 375.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 368–70.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 371. This diluted paint is probably a mixture of ultramarine and Prussian blue.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 372.
- 19 Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński and H. Travers Newton Jr, *Technique and Meaning in the Paintings of Paul Gauguin*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 109–11, argue on stylistic grounds that Gauguin himself painted this small portrait, but it is so schematic that an attribution cannot be made on the basis of style alone. A lack of additional evidence makes it impossible to prove this hypothesis. Fred Leeman *et al.*, *Émile Bernard (1868–1941)*, Paris 2013, p. 138, maintains that Bernard based the portrayal on an alleged self-portrait that Gauguin sketched around 1888, which is reproduced as the frontispiece in Maurice Malingue, *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, Paris 1946. Gauguin’s sketch and the schematic portrait in Bernard’s painting actually display many similarities, but the fact that Bernard painted the work so quickly makes it unlikely that he used a sketch by Gauguin. In fact, it is more likely that Gauguin made this sketch after Bernard’s schematic portrait. The incorrect lines in Gauguin’s sketch indicate that he was trying to draw a copy of something. When he worked from the imagination or from a model, his lines were much more assured.
- 20 Ormond and Bakker 2013, p. 373.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 376.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 372.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 375.
- 24 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, c. 5 October 1888 [↗ \[698\]](#): ‘Pour ton portrait – tu sais – je l’aime beaucoup – j’aime bien tout ce que tu fais d’ailleurs comme tu sais – et peut être personne n’a autant aimé ce que tu fais que moi avant moi.’

- 25 Bernard later elucidated this process in his article 'Mémoire pour l'histoire du symbolisme pictural de 1890', in *Maintenant*, no. 3, 1919: 'Then I wrote: "Everything that overloads a scene obscures it from reality and occupies our eyes to the detriment of our spirit. One must simplify the scene to make sense of it. One must get the scheme of it somehow", and indeed, I arrived at some more or less significant schemes. I had two ways to arrive at them. The first consisted in putting myself in front of nature and rigorously simplifying it. Sometimes this resulted in very large perspectives. Reducing one's lines to eloquent contrasts, one's nuances to 7 fundamental colours of the prism – [that] was the basis of the system. I wrote: "Behold the style and not the object. Bring out the abstract sense and not the objective." ('J'écrivais alors: "Tout ce qui surcharge un spectacle le couvre de réalité et occupe nos yeux au détriment de notre esprit. Il faut simplifier le spectacle pour en tirer le sens. Il faut en quelque sorte en faire le schéma", et je parvins, en effet, à des schémas plus ou moins significatifs. J'avais deux moyens pour y parvenir. Le premier consistait à me mettre devant la nature et à la simplifier jusqu'à la rigueur. Il en résulta parfois des aspects fort grands. Réduire ses lignes à d'éloquents contrastes, ses nuances aux 7 couleurs fondamentales du prisme fut la base du système. J'écrivais: "Voir le style et non pas l'objet. Dégager le sens abstrait et non l'objectif." Reprinted in Anne Rivière, *Emile Bernard: propos sur l'art*, 2 vols, Paris 1994, vol. 1, p. 201.
- 26 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 4 or 5 October 1888 [↗ \[697\]](#): 'I myself like Bernard's very much, it's nothing but an idea of a painter' ('moi j'aime fort celui de Bernard, c'est rien qu'une idée de peintre').
- 27 Ormond and Bakker 2013, pp. 382–83.
- 28 Emile Bernard (ed.), *Lettres de Vincent van Gogh à Emile Bernard*, Paris 1911, p. 14: 'formé ce projet de dessiner comme on écrit et avec la même facilité que le feraient un Hokousai ou un Outamaro. Nous étions, il faut l'avouer, des fervents des images japonaises.'
- 29 Chris Uhlenbeck, 'The Japanese Prints of Vincent van Gogh', in Chris Uhlenbeck, Louis van Tilborgh and Shigeru Oikawa, *Japanese Prints: The Collection of Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 2018, pp. 45–46; Emile Bernard, 'Affaire Vincent' (manuscript), *Art Documents*, no. 16, January 1952, in Rivière 1994, p. 313: 'One must place between 1886 and 1887 a Japanese influence instantly brought about by a bundle of Japanese prints acquired by Vincent.' ('Il faut placer entre 1886 et 1887 une influence japonaise qu'un ballot de crépon acquis par Vincent, détermina subitement.')
- 30 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 15 July 1888 [↗ \[640\]](#): 'The exhibition of Japanese prints that I had at the Tambourin had quite an influence on Anquetin and Bernard, but it was such a disaster.' ('L'exposition de crépons que j'ai eu au Tambourin a influencé Anquetin et Bernard joliment mais cela a été un tel désastre.')
- 31 Emile Bernard, 'Vincent van Gogh', *Les hommes d'aujourd'hui*, no. 390, 1890, in Rivière 1994, p. 26: 'On the table, amidst Japanese prints, balls of yarn, the interlaced threads of which played unexpected symphonies' ('Sur la table, parmi des crépons japonais, des boules de laine dont les fils entrelacés jouaient des symphonies imprévus'); Emile Bernard, 'Notes sur l'école dite de "Pont-Aven"', *Mercure de France*, no. 48, 1903, p. 678, in Rivière 1994, pp. 64–65: 'Vincent took me to his place. What I saw there was a curious mixture of the Netherlands and the Orient. Israëls and Mauve on neighbourly terms with Japanese prints. His painting was *au bitume* and in *petit point*. Of course all of this was Van Gogh-like, as a whole, but without cohesion, without certitude, without order. The studio was wallpapered with Japanese prints, of which he had acquired a bundle.' ('Vincent me mena chez lui. Ce qui s'y voyait était un mélange singulier de Hollande et de l'Orient. Israëls et Mauve voisinaient les crépons japonais. Sa peinture était au bitume et au petit point. Evidemment tout cela était du Van Gogh par l'ensemble, mais sans cohésion, sans certitude, sans ordre. L'atelier était tapissé de crépons japonais dont il venait d'acquérir un ballot.')

- 32 Emile Bernard, 'Julien Tanguy, dit le Père Tanquy', *Mercur de France*, no. 276, 16 December 1908, pp. 600–16, in Rivière 1994, p. 173: 'Vincent made a portrait of Tanguy in about 1886. He depicted him sitting in a room wallpapered with Japanese prints, wearing a big planter's hat, and [seen] symmetrically from the front like a Buddha.' ('Vincent a fait un portrait de Tanguy vers 1886. Il l'a représenté assis dans une salle tapissée de crépons japonais, coiffé d'un grand chapeau de planteur et symétriquement de face comme un Bouddha.')
- 33 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 15 July 1888 [↗ \[640\]](#): 'Then a month later, before I left, I no longer had the money and I'd also given a good many Japanese prints to Bernard, when I made the exchanges with him.' ('Or un mois plus tard avant mon départ je n'avais plus l'argent et j'avais encore donné pas mal de japonaiseries à Bernard alors que j'ai fait les échanges avec lui.')
- 34 Bernard 1911, p. 12: 'One evening Vincent said to me: "I'm leaving tomorrow, we'll arrange the studio together, in such a way that my brother thinks I'm still here." He pinned Japanese prints on the walls.' ('Un soir Vincent me dit: "Je pars demain, nous arrangeons l'atelier ensemble, de telle sorte que mon frère me croie encore ici." Il a cloué des crépons japonais aux murs.')
- 35 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Emile Bernard, 18 March 1888 [↗ \[587\]](#): 'My dear Bernard, having promised to write to you, I want to begin by telling you that this part of the world seems to me as beautiful as Japan for the clearness of the atmosphere and the gay colour effects. The stretches of water make patches of a beautiful emerald and a rich blue in the landscapes, as we see it in the Japanese prints.' ('Mon cher Bernard, ayant promis de t'écrire je veux commencer par te dire que le pays me parait aussi beau que le Japon pour la limpidité de l'atmosphère et les effets de couleur gaie. Les eaux font des taches d'un bel émeraude et d'un riche bleu dans les paysages ainsi que nous le voyons dans les crepons [sic].')
- 36 With thanks to Chris Uhlenbeck, 3 December 2019.
- 37 The Van Gogh Museum's collection of Japanese prints, most of which were acquired by the Van Goghs, contains [↗ 88 works by Utagawa Hiroshige \(1797-1858\)](#).
- 38 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. 312.
- 39 The portrait in question is [Portrait of Bernard's Grandmother](#). See Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 15 October 1888 [↗ \[704\]](#).
- 40 The complete dedication reads 'Vincent' and below it 'à Emile Bernard'. The dedication seems to be both faded and rubbed out. With thanks to Teio Meedendorp, Senior Researcher Van Gogh Museum, 5 December 2019.
- 41 Emile Bernard, letter to his father, 28 January 1900, published in Neil McWilliam (ed.), *Émile Bernard: les lettres d'un artiste (1884-1941)*, Dijon 2012, no. 249: 'j'y tiens autant comme souvenir d'amitié que comme peinture'.
- 42 Jansen, Luijten and Bakker 2007, p. 312; Jean-Jacques Luthi and Armand Israël, *Émile Bernard: instigateur de l'École de Pont-Aven, précurseur de l'art moderne - sa vie, son œuvre: catalogue raisonné*, Paris 2014, no. 318.