



Study Sheet with Portraits of Camille Roulin,
1888

Works Collected by Theo and Vincent van Gogh

Study Sheet with Portraits of Camille Roulin

Paul Gauguin

This large sheet - the latest of Paul Gauguin's (1848-1903) drawings in the collection of the Van Gogh Museum - contains three portrait studies of one or more boys. Gauguin drew these in the autumn of 1888, when he was staying with Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890) in Arles. Although Jo van Gogh-Bonger did not question the authorship of this sheet, it was not always attributed to Gauguin in the decades when it was on loan to the Stedelijk Museum.⁰¹ In the 1950s and 1960s, this sheet was catalogued at various exhibitions as the work of an unknown artist or by the hand of Emile Bernard (1868-1941).⁰² In 1970, however, Mark Roskill reattributed the work to Gauguin, and since then his authorship has not been doubted.⁰³

Angular lines and hatching

It is primarily the style of drawing seen in the middle boy that points to the hand of Gauguin. The considerable emphasis on the contour lines of the face and clothing, as well as the thickness and angularity of these lines, can be seen in many of the studies of Breton women that Gauguin made in 1886 and 1888, and also in the large portrait studies of Martinican women that he drew in 1887. The spare, subtle rendering of shadow, for example, corresponds to that seen in the drawn portrait of Marie Ginoux (fig. 1), which Gauguin made in Arles. The hatching that Gauguin applied to lend texture to the boy's cap displays a style that he used earlier in his Breton drawings, one being *Seated Breton Woman* (fig. 2). The area coloured in with chalk, which serves as a backdrop to the drawn model, is a means previously used by Gauguin to enhance a sheet. Here he let the blue of the background run into the boy's cap.



Paul Gauguin, *Seated Breton Woman*, 1886, black chalk and pastel on laid paper, 32.9 × 48.3 cm, Art Institute of Chicago, Mr and Mrs Carter H. Harrison Collection

Camille Roulin

The boy in the middle is Camille Roulin, the eleven-year-old son of Joseph Roulin, an Arles postman and good friend of Vincent van Gogh.⁰⁴ In late November and early December 1888, Van Gogh made an extensive series of portraits of the Roulins in which he painted each member of the family. Sometime in the first half of December 1888, therefore, Camille, wearing a buttoned cardigan and a beret, came to the Yellow House to have his portrait painted by Van Gogh (fig. 3).⁰⁵ These two items of clothing also occur in the drawn portrait by Gauguin; the cap is even the same colour as in Van Gogh's painting. A minor difference is that Gauguin made the cardigan striped, whereas Van Gogh painted it a more or less uniform green, flecked with yellow. For the rest, the small chin, the almond-shaped eyes and especially the big ears are much the same in both works (fig. 4). On the basis of these characteristic features, two studies in Gauguin's sketchbook can also be identified as portraits of Camille Roulin (fig. 5 and fig. 6).⁰⁶



Portrait of Camille Roulin, c. 1902, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

It is unclear whether the studies at left and right also portray Camille Roulin. Given the sheet's function, it stands to reason that Gauguin would have used it at a single session to make a number of sketches of the same model, varying the medium, the degree of finish and the facial expressions. In that case all three heads would portray Camille. Yet the boy in the middle seems older than the other two. The chubbier cheeks and the short, flat nose of the boy at right are indicative of a very young child, perhaps even a toddler. One hypothesis is that the portraits at the sides represent a son and/or grandson of Van Gogh's charwoman, whom he described as having 'a mixed bunch of kids'.⁰⁷ She may well have brought any or all of them along when she came to clean the Yellow House.

Even so, it is more likely that the two leftmost portraits were drawn during the same session. Gauguin used blue chalk to apply a backdrop to both heads, thus combining them into one work, belonging to one point in time. As mentioned earlier, he let the blue chalk run into the cap of the middle model. The hatching on the cap was applied after the blue chalk background. Despite the differing facial features, both sketches are probably likenesses of Camille, produced in a single session and bound by the blue zone behind them.

The small portrait at right could have originated during this same session or at some other time, since it was customary for Gauguin to draw on the still blank areas of previously used sheets. A comparison of this drawing with the portrait studies of Camille in Gauguin's sketchbook (see fig. 5 and fig. 6), which were done in the same rapid manner, reveals striking differences in the facial features. It is therefore likely that this depicts another child and not Camille Roulin.

The leftmost portrait differs in that its contours are accentuated with brown chalk instead of the black chalk seen in the other drawings, although the first exploratory lines in this drawing were in fact laid in with thin black chalk. ⁰⁸ The clothing of this boy was drawn with greasy yellow chalk, which was also used for the nose of the middle boy. In his cap, too, some yellow is visible between the blue, just as it is in the cap in Van Gogh's painting.

Portraiture without passion

This situation, with Gauguin drawing the model while Van Gogh painted him, recalls a previous portrait session in Arles, during which Van Gogh and Gauguin both immortalized Marie Ginoux. Then, too, Gauguin took up chalk and paper (see fig. 1), whereas Van Gogh chose oils and canvas to paint *L'Arlésienne* (1888, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). However, Gauguin's portrait study of Marie Ginoux differs in one important respect from *Study Sheet with Portraits of Camille Roulin*, since he actually used that drawing as the basis of a painting: *Café at Arles* (1888, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow).

In general, Gauguin appears not to have fully shared Van Gogh's enthusiasm for portraiture.⁰⁹ The half-hearted, unfinished *Portrait of Joseph-Michel Ginoux* also betrays Gauguin's disinterest. Only when portraying Camille's mother, Augustine Roulin, did he work with complete concentration, which resulted in *Madame Roulin* (1888, Saint Louis Art Museum).

When Gauguin left Arles, he did not take the present sheet with him, and he also left behind his portrait of Marie Ginoux (*L'Arlésienne*), *Portrait of Joseph-Michel Ginoux* and *Study of a Woman Seen from the Back*.¹⁰ This is odd, considering Gauguin often took his works to his next destination, where they might prove useful in a new composition.¹¹ Yet several weeks after his departure on 25 December 1888, Gauguin told Van Gogh in a letter that he would not be needing the studies he had left in Arles. This work, and indeed the other studies he left behind, therefore ended up in the collection of Vincent and Theo van Gogh.¹²

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**Object details**

Study Sheet with Portraits of Camille Roulin

Artist

Paul Gauguin (1848 - 1903)

Date

1888

Medium

black and coloured chalk on wove paper

Dimensions

33 cm x 49.4 cm

Inscriptions

Ir van Gogh 122

Inventory Number

d0677V1962

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

**Provenance**

Study Sheet with Portraits of Camille Roulin

Left by the artist with Vincent van Gogh, Arles, 25 December 1888; sent by Vincent van Gogh 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 (as Unknown, Drie kinderstudies); 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

Study Sheet with Portraits of Camille Roulin

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *De verzameling van Theo van Gogh : met uitzondering van de werken van zijn broer Vincent*, 31 March-11 May 1953, no. 103, *Drie kinderstudies*

The Hague, Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, *De verzameling van Theo van Gogh : met uitzondering van de werken van zijn broer Vincent*, 11 June-2 August 1953, no. 103, *Drie kinderstudies*

Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum, *De verzameling van Theo van Gogh : met uitzondering van de werken van zijn broer Vincent*, 5 September-15 November 1953, no. 103, *Drie kinderstudies*

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, 29 January-29 February 1960, no. 110, *Drie kinderstudies*

Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, 12 March-29 May 1960, no. 110, *Drie kinderstudies*

Paris, Institut Néerlandais, *Les amis de Van Gogh*, 9 November-17 December 1960, no. 86, *Etudes d'enfants*

London, Tate Gallery, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven group*, 7 January-13 February 1966, no. 283, *Three Studies of Children*

Zurich, Kunsthaus Zürich, *Pont-Aven : Gauguin und sein Kreis in der Bretagne*, 5 March-11 April 1966, no. 303, *Drei Studien von Kindern*

Tokyo, Seiji Togo Memorial Yasuda Kasai Museum of Art, *Vincent van Gogh drawing exhibition. Van Gogh and his time from the Van Gogh Museum and the H.W. Mesdag Museum*, 14 September-13 November 2000, no. 55, *Studies for Childrens' Portraits*



Literature

Study Sheet with Portraits of Camille Roulin

- Felix Andreas Baumann *et al.* (eds.), *Pont-Aven: Gauguin und sein Kreis in der Bretagne*, exh. cat., Zurich (Kunsthaus Zürich) 1966, no. 303, p. 87; BVG00931
- Denys Sutton and Gabriel White, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven Group*, exh. cat., London (Tate Gallery) 1966, no. 283, p. 45; BVG01638
- Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and the Impressionist Circle*, London 1970, no. 155, p. 301; BVG00546
- Evert van Uiter and Michael Hoyle (eds.), *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, no. 2.98, p. 382; BVG08057
- Sjraar van Heugten *et al.* (eds.), *Vincent van Gogh Drawing Exhibition. Van Gogh and His Time from the Van Gogh Museum and the H.W. Mesdag Museum*, exh. cat., Tokyo (Seiji Togo Memorial Yasuda Kasai Museum of Art) 2000, no. 55, pp. 148-49, 191-92; BVG15949

Figures



Fig. 1

Paul Gauguin, *L'Arlésienne (Mme Ginoux, née Marie Julien, 1848-1917)*, 1888, charcoal and coloured chalk, heightened with white chalk, on wove paper, 56.1 × 49.2 cm, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Memorial gift from Dr. T. Edward and Tullah Hanley, Bradford, Pennsylvania



Fig. 2

Paul Gauguin, *Seated Breton Woman*, 1886, black chalk and pastel on laid paper, 32.9 × 48.3 cm, Art Institute of Chicago, Mr and Mrs Carter H. Harrison Collection



Fig. 3

Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Camille Roulin*, 1888, oil on canvas, 43.2 × 34.9 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, gift of Mr and Mrs Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee, 1973



Fig. 4

Portrait of Camille Roulin, c. 1902, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Fig. 5

Paul Gauguin, *Sketches of Camille Roulin*, 1888, in the 'Carnet Huyghe', published in and reproduced from René Huyghe's facsimile *Le Carnet de Paul Gauguin*, 1952



Fig. 6

Paul Gauguin, Sketches of Camille Roulin, 1888, in the 'Carnet Huyghe', published in and reproduced from René Huyghe's facsimile *Le Carnet de Paul Gauguin*, 1952

Footnotes

- 01 The work was on loan to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, from c. 1930 to 1973. A note made by the engineer Vincent Willem van Gogh next to the entry to this work in his copy of *Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven* (exh. cat., London (Tate Gallery) 1966, p. 45) reads: 'Always recorded as Gauguin by my mother (from way back)' ('Altijd als Gauguin aangegeven door mijn moeder (van oudsher)').
- 02 See the exhibitions Amsterdam, Otterlo and The Hague, 1953, Amsterdam and Otterlo 1960, Paris 1960 and Zurich and London 1966. It also states on the back of the drawing that it could be by Bernard. This annotation dates from the period in which the work was on loan to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.
- 03 Mark Roskill, *Van Gogh, Gauguin and French Painting of the 1880s: A Catalogue Raisonné of Key Works*, Ann Arbor 1970, p. 168.
- 04 In all likelihood Gauguin made two more drawings of Camille Roulin, both in his sketchbook. See the 'Carnet Huyghe', p. 225, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The 'Carnet Huyghe' is the sketchbook that Paul Gauguin had with him when he was staying with Van Gogh in Arles. In 1952 it was published by René Huyghe as a facsimile under the title *Le Carnet de Paul Gauguin*.
- 05 Douglas W. Druick, Britt Salvesen and Peter Zegers (eds.), *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South*, exh. cat., Chicago (Art Institute of Chicago) / Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), New York 2001, p. 234.
- 06 It is possible that these likenesses were drawn during an earlier portrait session with the boy, which in Van Gogh's case resulted in *Camille Roulin*. See Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 1 December 1888 [↗ \[723\]](#).
- 07 Bernadette Murphy states that Van Gogh's charwoman was Thérèse Balmossière and that she already had several grandchildren by the age of forty-nine. See Bernadette Murphy, *Van Gogh's Ear: The True Story*, London 2016, pp. 94-95. Regarding 'a mixed bunch of kids': Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 9 September 1888 [↗ \[677\]](#): 'Most fortunately I have a charwoman who's very loyal [...]. She's quite old and has a mixed bunch of kids, and she keeps my tiles nice and red and clean.' ('J'ai fort heureusement une femme de chambre qui est très fidèle [...]. elle est assez vieille et a beaucoup de gosses divers et elle me tient mes carreaux bien rouges et propres.')
- 08 This is unusual for Gauguin, who generally used black and not coloured chalk to accentuate the contour lines in his drawings.
- 09 Van Gogh's enthusiasm is apparent from the fact that he made no fewer than fifteen portraits of the Roulin family that autumn.
- 10 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 17 January 1889 [↗ \[736\]](#): 'I'll send back his studies - which will probably have uses for him that they certainly wouldn't have for me.' ('Je lui renverrai ses études [*sic*] - qui probablement auront pour lui des utilités qu'elles n'auraient aucunement pour moi.')
- For example, Gauguin took a study of women bathing, which he had made in Dieppe in 1885, with him to Martinique, where he used the back of the sheet for figure studies. Study of Women Bathing, 1885 (recto), Various Sketches, 1887 (verso), Conseil départemental de la Réunion - Musée Léon-Dierx, Saint-Denis de La Réunion.

- 11 For example, Gauguin took a study of women bathing, which he had made in Dieppe in 1885, with him to Martinique, where he used the back of the sheet for figure studies. *Study of Women Bathing*, 1885 (recto), *Various Sketches*, 1887 (verso), Conseil départemental de la Réunion - Musée Léon-Dierx, Saint-Denis de La Réunion.

- 12 Paul Gauguin, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 17 January 1889 [↗ \[737\]](#): 'Don't bother yourself with the studies that I deliberately left in Arles as not being worth the trouble of transporting them.' ('Ne vous occupez pas des études que j'ai laissées exprès à Arles comme ne valant pas la peine du transport.') After the deaths of Vincent and Theo van Gogh, Jo van Gogh-Bonger never sold a drawing by Gauguin from the collection, at least not knowingly. In 1910 she sold *L'Arlésienne* (the portrait of Marie Ginoux), thinking that it was a Van Gogh. See Chris Stolwijk and Han Veenenbos, *The Account Book of Theo van Gogh and Jo van Gogh-Bonger*, Amsterdam 2002, p. 200.