

Garden with Hollyhocks Ernest Quost (1844 - 1931), 1886-1890



The New Season (La saison nouvelle) Ernest Quost (1844 - 1931), c. 1882

Works Collected by Theo and Vincent van Gogh

'Garden with Hollyhocks' and 'The New Season' Ernest Quost

The painter Ernest Quost (1844–1931) was known for his expertise in capturing flowers, and hollyhocks were his speciality. During his time in Arles, Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) too sought to establish a similar reputation with an association with sunflowers: 'Quost has the hollyhock, but I have the sunflower, in a way.' Ol Quost received his training at the Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory, where he honed his skills creating floral decorations, and he briefly attended the Académie Julian in Paris. In addition, he closely studied plants under the guidance of a gardener in Saint-Ouen, located just outside the city. During the 1870s and 1880s, Quost cultivated his own garden in Montmartre, where he worked extensively. Olar Aside from flower still lifes, village scenes and garden landscapes constitute the bulk of his oeuvre.

Hollyhocks in the limelight

The painting Garden with Hollyhocks perfectly illustrates 'Quost's magnificent and so-complete Hollyhocks', which Van Gogh greatly admired. O3 Set against a bright blue summer sky and sunlit white walls, Quost skilfully portrayed a group of spectacular pink and white hollyhocks in a garden teeming with various flowers and plants. At the left, a woman can be seen strolling towards the bushes. Interestingly, another work by Quost depicts the same spot, featuring a woman dressed in the same attire (fig. 1) . This second painting provides further clarity, revealing that the sand-coloured foreground in *Garden with Hollyhocks* actually represents a path, while the plants above it at the right are pumpkins. O4



Ernest Quost, *Hollyhocks*, c. 1885-90, oil on panel, 55 × 45.5 cm, private collection

The painting exhibits Quost's use of lively brushstrokes. Beneath the paint layer is a light-coloured primer serving as a base for the composition. In certain areas, such as the central group of hollyhocks, traces of underdrawing can be discerned. The back of the panel provides additional information that goes beyond the artist's inscription. Notably, the number 10 stands for the standard panel size known as 'portrait 10' (55 \times 46 cm). For this particular image of a garden, Quost rotated the panel a quarter-turn from its usual vertical format to a horizontal one. Os Furthermore, the presence of the P. Contet stamp affords insight into the supplier from whom Quost obtained this panel. It allows us to establish that the painting could not have been created before 1886, as that was the year when P. Contet became the new name of an artist's supply store known as Latouche.

Quost and the Van Gogh brothers

Vincent and Theo van Gogh (1857–1891) probably interacted with Quost during the time the brothers shared an apartment in Paris (February 1886–February 1888). A sketchbook sheet by Vincent from that period bears the address of Quost's studio, and Vincent also noted his name while visiting the Salon in 1886. Of This coincides with the year when Van Gogh also painted a still life of hollyhocks in a vase (1886, Kunsthaus Zurich), possibly inspired by Quost's hollyhock painting, *Wildflowers* which he must have seen at the Salon. It is possible that Quost may have even provided flowers for Van Gogh's own still life compositions. In a letter to his mother, Theo wrote: 'Hardly a day passes without him [Vincent] being invited to visit the studios of famous painters, or otherwise one comes to him. Thus he also has acquaintances from whom he weekly receives a nice shipment of flowers, which can serve him as a model.'

However, Quost's name does not appear in the brothers' correspondence until August 1888. ¹⁰ In 1890 Theo expressed admiration for Quost's painting *Easter Flowers* (1890, La Piscine, Roubaix), exhibited at the Salon. He described it as 'very gentle and harmonious, and all the same there's colour in it'. ¹¹ He even suggested displaying it prominently 'on the boulevard in the window' at his art firm, Goupil & Cie. ¹² Theo wrote to his brother, who was in Auvers, that he had seen 'Quost the other day and I spoke to him about you. I was telling him that you greatly appreciated his talent, which he said pleased him no end. If you come to Paris you mustn't fail to visit him, he would be delighted to see you either in the garden or at his place. ¹³ Vincent, equally enthusiastic, responded: 'I'd very much like to come to Paris for a few days a little later, precisely in order to go and see Quost once, to see Jeannin, one or two others. I'd very much like you to have a Quost, and there would probably be a way of exchanging one. ¹⁴ After Vincent died, Quost reached out to Theo, expressing his condolences: 'With all my regrets my dear Mr Van Gogh, your brother had a warm heart and was a true artist.' ¹⁵

The painting *Garden with Hollyhocks* was acquired by the Vincent van Gogh Foundation from a private collection in 1996. An intriguing inscription on the back of the panel reads: 'To Theo van Gogh/ This painting that my friend Vincent loves so much/ With warm regards/ E. Quost'. ¹⁶ The use of the present tense suggests that the painter intended to give the work to Theo while Vincent was still alive, as he was aware of Vincent's admiration for this painting. It is possible that Vincent had seen it when he was in Paris in early July 1890. ¹⁷ It also may have been part of the exchange he mentioned, implying that Quost's painting would then come into Theo's possession. However, it remains unclear whether the painting actually ended up with Theo at the time and, if so, why it was not included in his estate.

The new season

The Van Gogh Museum collection includes not only the painting *Garden with Hollyhocks* but also Quost's drawing titled *The New Season (La saison nouvelle)*. It is likely that this drawing did become part of Theo's collection during the period when he and the artist were in contact with each other. In this drawing, as in the painting, all attention is focused on a 'framed' glimpse of nature. The drawing is a preliminary study for the painting *The New Season: Flowers*, which Quost exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1882 (fig. 2) . ¹⁸ The painting won a silver medal and was acquired by the French state for the Musée du Luxembourg (fig. 3). ¹⁹ On the whole, the Salon reviews were very laudatory. *Le Figaro-Salon* even reported that 'this painting of flowers is one of the prettiest works in the Salon'. ²⁰ The drawing is a study for and largely matches the representation in the painting. On the right is presumably a peach tree and on the left a rhododendron, both in full bloom - entirely fitting for the title of the work. ²¹ In the left background is a difficult to identify diagonal object, towards which the birds seem to be drawn. According to a description of the painting, grapes can be seen in that corner: 'A large work by Monsieur Quost brings us a harvest of expansively painted flowers and grapes so flavoursome that one would happily imitate the bird that has come to peck at them.' ²² Yet the same critic, too, questions this passage: 'But why this rising background, this lawn that appears to stand up straight like a wall and is as ambiguous in its colour as in its perspective?' ²³

For each type of vegetation, Quost used a different approach in handling the chalk in the drawing: for example, short, thick lines for the peach tree trunk; long, thin lines for the branches; and wavy lines for the blossoms. He even allowed the white paper to play a role in depicting the flowers of the rhododendron. Another sheet, featuring two sketches for this composition, exists in the collection of the Musée du Louvre (fig. 4). The upper sketch consists of numerous exploratory lines and appears to serve primarily as an exercise to achieve the correct composition. In comparison to the initially square format, the final, cropped composition of the upper sketch (which is slightly more elaborate) is more interesting. The fleeting sketch below it seems to represent the intended final result, complete with a frame. With its assured lines and no changes, it served as a clear setup for the drawing in the Van Gogh Museum. The framing line around the composition gives the work an independent character. This drawing was reproduced on the front page of an issue of the magazine *La Presse* dedicated to the Salon exhibition (fig. 5). It can be inferred from the accompanying commentary that Quost himself had suggested this preliminary study for that purpose: 'the reproduction of a sketch, unfortunately too cursory, that we owe to the kindness of the artist and which replicates his submission to the Salon'. ²⁴

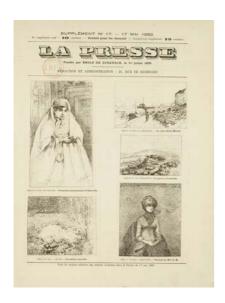


Illustration of Ernest Quost's *The New Season* in *La Presse*, supplement 17, 17 May 1882, p. 1. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

Nature as a starting point

In addition to the drawing and sketches, some separate studies of rhododendron flowers by Quost have survived. ²⁵ He explicitly valued all stages of the working process to arrive at a 'well-stocked memory' ('mémoire garnie'): 'One must make many sketches and rapid studies so as to store away as many memories of nature as possible in one's mind. These are the memories that one recites, so to speak, when searching for a composition.' ²⁶ Quost also stressed the importance of a personal impression of nature: 'See nature, nothing else. Remember nature, nothing else. Follow your own sensation, and nothing else.' ²⁷ The two works in the Van Gogh Museum are excellent examples of how Quost took nature as the starting point for his compositions. Above all, they express his love for all that blooms.

Renske Suijver November 2023

Citation

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Object details

Garden with Hollyhocks

Artist

Ernest Quost (1844 - 1931)

Date

1886-1890

Medium

oil on panel

Dimensions

45.5 cm x 55 cm

Inscriptions

E. Quost.

Inventory Number

s0457V1996

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



Object details

The New Season (La saison nouvelle)

Artist

Ernest Quost (1844 - 1931)

Date

c. 1882

Medium

black chalk on laid paper

Dimensions

23.8 cm x 30.7 cm

Inscriptions

E.Q.

LA SAISON NOUVELLE

Inventory Number

d0687V1962

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)





Garden with Hollyhocks
Front & Back



Provenance

Garden with Hollyhocks

Private collection; sold by Galerie Elstir, Paris to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, on or after 20 February 1996; since then on permanent loan to the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



Provenance

The New Season (La saison nouvelle)

Theo van Gogh, Paris; 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

Garden with Hollyhocks

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

September 1999, no. 160, Veld met stokrozen

Paris, Musée d'Orsay, *Theo van Gogh 1857-1891. Marchand de tableaux, collectionneur, frère de Vincent*, 27 September 1999-9 January 2000, no. 109, *Jardin des roses trémières*

Sapporo, Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, *Vincent & Theo van Gogh*, 5 July-25 August 2002, no. 54, *Garden with Hollyhock*

Kōbe, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, *Vincent & Theo van Gogh*, 7 September-4 November 2002, no. 54, *Garden with Hollyhock*

Tokyo, Seiji Togo Memorial Sompo Japan Museum of Art, *Van Gogh and his contemporaries. Van Gogh and flowers. With special focus on his 'Sunflowers'*, 20 September-14 December 2003, no. 13, *Garden with Hollyhock*

Tokyo, National Art Center, *Van Gogh.The adventure of becoming an artist*, 1 October-20 December 2010, no. 64, *Garden with Hollyhocks*

Fukuoka, Kyushu National Museum, *Van Gogh. The adventure* of becoming an artist, 28 December 2010-13 February 2011, no. 64, *Garden with Hollyhocks*

Nagoya, Nagoya City Art Museum, *Van Gogh. The adventure of becoming an artist*, 22 February-10 April 2011, no. 64, *Garden with Hollyhocks*



Literature

Garden with Hollyhocks

- Ronald de Leeuw and Louis van Tilborgh (eds.), Van Gogh Museum Journal 1996, Zwolle 1997, p. 203
- Leo Jansen, Jan Robert and Han van Crimpen (eds.), Brief Happiness: The Correspondence of Theo van Gogh and Jo Bonger, Amsterdam & Zwolle 1999 (unpaginated)
- Chris Stolwijk and Richard Thomson (eds.), with a contribution by Sjraar van Heugten, Theo van Gogh, 1857-1891: Art Dealer, Collector and Brother of Vincent, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay), Amsterdam & Zwolle 1999, no. 109, pp. 161, 219
- Aukje Vergeest, The French Collection:
 Nineteenth-Century French Paintings in
 Dutch Public Collections, Amsterdam 2000,
 no. 819, p. 260
- Yukihiro Sato (ed.), Vincent and Theo van Gogh, exh. cat., Sapporo (Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art), Hyōgo (Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art) 2002, no. 54, p. 161
- Sjraar van Heugten and Noboyuki Senzoku (eds.), Van Gogh and Flowers: Van Gogh and his Contemporaries, with Special Focus on his 'Sunflowers', exh. cat., Tokyo (Seiji Togo Memorial Sompo Japan Museum of Art) 2003, no. 13, pp. 60-61
- Laura Coyle, The Still-Life Paintings of Vincent van Gogh and their Context, Ann Arbor, MI 2007, p. 299
- 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. 5: Saint-Rémy-

- *de-Provence Auvers-sur-Oise, 1889-1890,* p. 286
- Esther Dieltjes, entry in Chris Stolwijk (ed.),
 Van Gogh: The Adventure of Becoming an Artist, exh. cat., Tokyo (National Art Center)
 2010, no. 64, p. 109
- Martin Bailey, The Sunflowers are Mine: The Story of Van Gogh's Masterpiece, London 2013, pp. 9, 14-15
- Michael Philipp and Otrud Westheimer (eds.), Van Gogh: Still Lifes, exh. cat., Potsdam (Museum Barberini), Munich, London & New York 2019, pp. 78, 81, 175



Literature

The New Season (La saison nouvelle)

- De Belina, 'La Presse-Salon', La Presse (17 May 1882), p. 3 and supplement
- Evert van Uitert and M. Hoyle (eds.), *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, no. 2.750, p. 489



Letters

Garden with Hollyhocks

 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Auvers-sur-Oise, 24 June 1890 7 891.

Figures



Fig. 1
Ernest Quost, *Hollyhocks*, c. 1885-90, oil on panel, 55 × 45.5 cm, private collection



Fig. 2

Ernest Quost, *The New Season: Flowers*, c. 1882, oil on canvas, 157 × 190 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; French Embassy, London. Photo: RMN-Grand Palais (musée d'Orsay) / Gérard Blot / Christian Jean



Fig. 3G. Michelez, Album with photographs of the works purchased by the French state at the Salon of 1882



Fig. 4

Ernest Quost, Sketch for *The New Season* with a sketch of the work in a frame (present title: *Flower Bed, Shrubs, and Sketch of a Painting with its Frame* [Massif de fleurs, arbrisseaux, et croquis d'un tableau avec son cadre]), n. d., pencil, pen, brown ink and brown wash, 32.7×21.8 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris

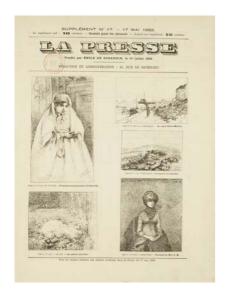


Fig. 5

Illustration of Ernest Quost's *The New Season* in *La Presse*, supplement 17, 17 May 1882, p. 1. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

Footnotes

- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 22 January 1889 7 [741]: 'Quost a la rose tremiere mais moi j'ai un peu le tournesol.'
- Françoise Cachin and Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, with the assistance of Monique Nonne, *Van Gogh à Paris*, exh. cat., Paris (Musée d'Orsay) 1988, p. 265.
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 1 February 1890 [850]: 'Why not say, with more reason, what he says about my sunflowers about Quost's magnificent and so-complete Hollyhocks and about his yellow irises, about Jeannin's splendid peonies?' ('Pourquoi ne pas dire à plus forte raison ce qu'il dit de mes tournesols des magnifiques et si complètes Roses tremières de Quost et de ses iris jaunes, des splendides pivoines de Jeannin.')
- O4 This identification is confirmed by Hans den Nijs, independent researcher on biodiversity, who indicates that means the work would have been painted between about mid-July and September. The white flowers in the foreground and the yellow-orange patch in the background cannot be identified with certainty.
- Catalogue overview of standard formats, Lefranc & Cie, 1889, illustrated in Ella Hendriks, with a material technical analysis by Muriel Geldof, 'Van Gogh's Working Practice: A Technical Study', in Ella Hendriks and Louis van Tilborgh, *Vincent van Gogh Paintings*, 2 vols., Amsterdam & Zwolle 2011, vol. 2: *Antwerp and Paris, 1885-1888*, p. 94. These standard sizes applied mainly to canvases, but all supports were available in these formats. See Anthea Callen, Kate Gillimore and Jane Havell, *The Art of Impressionism: Painting Technique and the Making of Modernity*, New Haven, CT & London 2000, p. 15.
- See <u>7 'Contet (P.): 1886-1920'</u>, accessed June 2023. Inscribed on the stamp: '[TOI]LES A PEINDRE & COULEURS FINES P. CONTET, 34, Rue Lafayette, PARIS'.
- Respectively d0140V1962r and d0413-052V1962, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation); Marije Vellekoop and Renske Suijver, *Vincent van Gogh: The Sketchbooks: Commentary*, Amsterdam & London 2013, p. 72; Cachin and Welsh-Ovcharov 1988, p. 266.
- O8 Notice d'œuvre: Fleurs des champs', accessed June 2023; Cachin and Welsh-Ovcharov 1988, p. 52.
- Theo van Gogh, letter to Anna Cornelia van Gogh-Carbentus, Paris, between 1 August and 8 October 1886, b942V1962, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation): 'er gaat bijna geen dag voorbij of hij wordt gevraagd om op de ateliers van schilders van naam te komen, of wel komt men bij hem. Zoo heeft hij ook kennissen waarvan hij elke week een mooie bezending bloemen krijgt, die hem als model kunnen dienen.' Suggestion in Laura Ann Coyle, *The Still-Life Paintings of Vincent van Gogh and Their Context* (diss. Princeton University, 2007), p. 299.
- Quost's name also occurs in Theo van Gogh's address book circa 1888–91, b2947V1982, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).
- Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 23 June 1890 7 [890]: 'C'est très doux & harmonieux & tout de même il y a de la couleur.'

Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 30 June and 1 July 1890 7 [894]: 'Nous irons lui demander si je puis l'exposer sur le Boulevard en vitrine, s'il n'est pas trop grand.'

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- Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 23 June 1890 7 [890]: 'L'autre jour j'ai vu Quost & je lui ai parlé de toi. Je lui disais que tu aimais beaucoup son talent, ce qui lui faisait bien plaisir disait il. Si tu viens à Paris tu ne dois pas manquer d'aller le voir, il sera très content quand tu viendras le voir, soit au jardin soit chez lui.'
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 24 June 1890 7 [891]: 'J'aimerais beaucoup un peu plus tard venir à Paris quelques jours, précisement pour aller une fois chez Quost, chez Jeannin, un ou deux autres. je voudrais bien que tu eusses un Quost et il y aurait probablement moyen d'en echanger un.'
- Ernest Quost, letter to Theo van Gogh, about 1 August 1890, b1881V1962, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation): 'Tous mes regrets mon cher monsieur van Gogh votre frère était un cœur chaud et un artiste sincere [sic].'
- 'A Theo van Gogh/ Ce tableau qu'aime tant mon ami Vincent/ Bien amicalement/ E. Quost.' The handwriting is considerably neater than that in Quost's letter mentioned in note 15 above; however, a similar manner of writing in some other letters confirms that the inscription is original.
- Leading up to that visit, the brothers wrote repeatedly that Vincent would then have to meet Quost as well. See letters **7** [890], **7** [891] and **7** [894].
- 18 Notice d'œuvre: La saison nouvelle; fleurs', accessed June 2023. This Salon opened on 1 May 1882; the closing date is unknown.
- Courrier de l'art: chronique hebdomadaire des ateliers, des musées, des expositions, des ventes publiques... (25 May 1882), p. 244, and (8 June 1882), p. 269.
- Albert Wolff, *Le Figaro-Salon: supplément du Figaro* 8, no. 17 (17 May 1882), p. 3: 'ce tableau de fleurs est un des plus jolis morceaux du Salon'.
- So long as the colour of the flowers in the painting is unknown, it is not certain whether it is a peach tree (which has pink blossoms). It could also be a cherry tree (with white flowers). Thanks to Hans den Nijs for this information. However, a contemporary critic suggests the former (as well as pink and white rhododendrons): 'What beautiful pink and white rhododendrons, and the pretty peach tree with its blossoming calyxes, in which the vermillion and a shade of madder are beginning to shine' ('Quels beaux rhododendrons roses et blancs, et le joli pêcher aux calices épanouis où le vermillon et une teinte de laque commencent à briller'). Théodore Véron, 8e annuaire dictionnaire Véron, ou organe de l' institut universel des sciences, des lettres et des arts du XIXe siècle (section des beaux-arts): Salon de 1882, Paris 1882, pp. 296-97.
- LUC, Le moniteur des Pyrénées: journal paraissant tous les jours excepté le dimanche 1, no. 30 (5-6 February 1882), p. 3: 'Un grand cadre de Monsieur Quost nous apporte une moisson de fleurs amplement peintes et des raisins si savoureux qu'on imiterait volontiers l'oiseau qui vient les becqueter.'
- 23 Ibid.: 'Mais pourquoi ce fond montant, cette pelouse qui a l'air de se tenir droite comme un mur et qui est aussi indécise comme couleur que comme perspective.'

- 24 La Presse, supplement 17 (17 May 1882), p. 1, and De Belina, 'Quost', La Presse (17 May 1882), p. 3: 'Today, in our supplement, we publish the reproduction of a sketch, unfortunately too cursory, that we owe to the kindness of the artist and which replicates his submission to the Salon.' ('Nous publions dans notre supplément, aujourd'hui, la reproduction d'un croquis, malheureusement trop sommaire, que nous devons à l'obligeance de cet artiste et qui rappelle son envoi au Salon.') Remarkably, a drawing by Hans Heyerdahl (1857-1913) had also earlier ended up in Theo's collection and similarly served to illustrate a Salon painting in La Presse in 1882. See the entry on Heyerdahl's <u>Mother of the Dying Child</u>. Possibly Theo was in a good position to obtain these drawings.
- 25 The Open Heritage Platform, accessed July 2023.
- Atelier Ernest Quost: Céramiques peintes, sculptures, peintures, sales catalogue, Hôtel Drouot, Paris 1969: 'Il faut faire beaucoup de croquis et beaucoup de pochades pour emmagasiner dans son esprit le plus de souvenirs de nature possible. Ce sont des souvenirs qu'on récite pour ainsi dire quand on cherche une composition.'
- 27 Ibid.: 'Voir la nature, rien autre chose, Se souvenir de la nature, de rien autre chose, Suivre sa sensation personelle, aucune autre.'