

paid the owner of one of these establishments to go on holiday so he could photograph the man's clients (pls.51–63). When *Vogue's* Art Director, Alex Liberman, saw them, he insisted on running them in the magazine.

Penn had no choice in the matter, and the black-and-white photographs from the Peru trip were reproduced in *Vogue* with an antique colourisation. Penn's need to keep some work just for himself fuelled his next self-assigned project, a series of nude studies (pls.64–89; Fig.93). The models he used for these were the antithesis of the sort dressed in couture for his fashion photographs: they had the plump, doughy bodies of art school models, yet Penn printed his photographs of some of these much more human women in a way that made them appear ethereal. Between the pale prints and the inelegant subject-matter, here, at last, was a Penn project for which *Vogue* had no use.

In her catalogue essay on these nudes, however, Hambourg overlooks the potentially subversive purpose of the series.³ Another place where a certain naïvety shows up (although of an opposite kind) is in Rosenheim's account of Penn's decision during the 1970s to begin working with the antique art of platinum-palladium printing. Rosenheim treats this as a high-minded commitment to art, an expression of Penn's wish to escape the increasingly crass commercialism of magazine photography. That was certainly part of his motive, but there was also a purely commercial interest involved. Penn had recently had to close, for lack of clients, a commercial studio he had maintained for commissions from the advertising industry. He saw the coming market in art photography as an opportunity to compensate himself for some of that lost revenue.

The series of rooms of his own in which Penn worked began with his first trip to Paris in 1950. Frustrated by trying to do fashion photography in the hurly-burly of the catwalk shows, Penn insisted that Liberman find him a studio somewhere in Paris with good north

light. The space he got was a closed photography school, to which models had to be brought. With a quiet originality that stole the show from all his rivals' catwalk shots, the photographs he made there are as elegant as the clothes they depict (pl.41; Fig.94).

¹ Issey Miyake in conversation with this reviewer, 7th March 1997.

² C. Westerbeck, ed.: exh. cat. *Irving Penn: A Career in Photography*, Chicago (Art Institute) 1997.

³ Catalogue: *Irving Penn: Centennial*. Edited by Maria Morris Hambourg and Jeffrey L. Rosenheim. 372 pp. incl. 365 col. ills. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2017), £50. ISBN 978-1-58839-618-1.

Gauguin

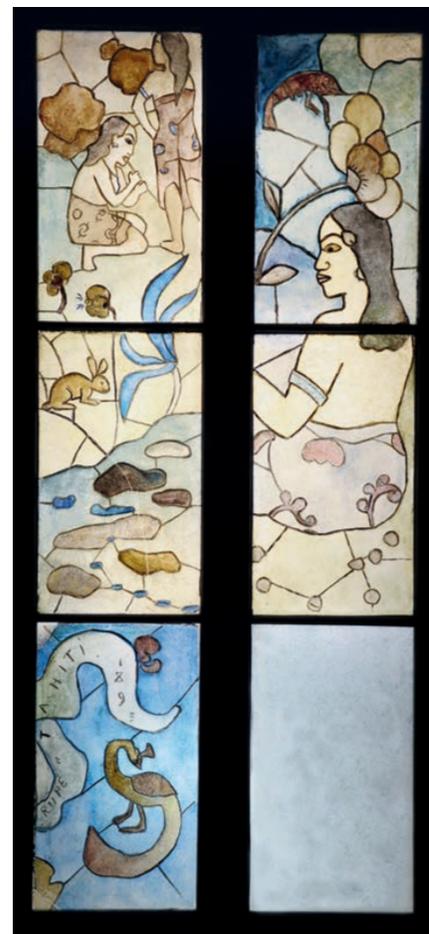
Chicago and Paris

by ELIZABETH C. CHILDS

IN OUR AGE of dwindling arts budgets and the loan fatigue suffered by major works by key Modernists, blockbuster exhibitions are growing less frequent, particularly ones that contribute new scholarship as they draw on the popular appeal of those artists. It takes great resources, scholarly vision, curatorial inventiveness, international collaboration and sustained determination to pull off such an exhibition. Yet that is precisely what the curators Gloria Groom, Ophélie Ferlier-Bouat and Claire Bernardi have done in the ambitious and deeply fascinating *Gauguin: Artist as Alchemist*, on view at the **Art Institute of Chicago** (to 10th September) and then at the Grand Palais, Paris (11th October–22nd January 2018).

The sheer scale of this exhibition is impressive: in Chicago 247 objects (227 works by Gauguin) fill nine galleries, and the Paris show promises to be equally expansive. The range and quality of works on view is a testament to the extremely strong collections of work by Gauguin in each institution. The goal here is to reveal the artist's distinctive inter-medial creative process, privileging the way that experimentation with forms and in media beyond painting informed his thinking across his entire *œuvre*. This show intentionally draws less attention to his well-studied biography and in many cases brings together works from various periods in Gauguin's life to draw new comparisons. This presentation also shifts the emphasis away from the varied cultures he encountered and the geographic focus that has informed shows such as the Polynesian-themed exhibitions in Boston and Paris (2003), and in Seattle and Copenhagen (2011).¹

All the media in which Gauguin worked between 1877 and 1903 are included. In Chicago we see not only forty-three significant paintings, twenty-eight ceramics, thirty-three wooden sculptures and fifteen woodblocks, but over a hundred works



95. *Rupe Tahiti (Hurrah Tahiti)*, by Paul Gauguin. 1893. Oil on glass, 196.2 by 88.9 cm. (New Orleans Museum of Art; exh. Art Institute of Chicago).

on paper, ranging from watercolour and gouache to his distinctive woodblock prints, monotypes, transfer drawings, pastels and drawings. The ceramics, representing about half of Gauguin's corpus, offer the greatest surprises in form, glazes and textures. Other revelations include small busts in wax and marble from Gauguin's early career, two carved cabinets that are as functional as they are visually imposing and the remarkable window painted in Tahiti with oils in a manner that mimics stained glass (cat. no.176; Fig.95). His prodigious career as an artist-writer is present in albums; remarkably, the original *Noa Noa* manuscript – as fragile as it is significant – is here, opened to a key page to demonstrate the circulation of the form of a dreaming Tahitian woman (no.208) that migrates from watercolour to wood and to print.

A colourful installation serves this complex assemblage of works exceedingly well. The opening gallery presents Gauguin's early years in an intimate space decorated with a lively patterned wallpaper evocative of a bourgeois home; Gauguin's carved and painted cabinet (no.10), domestic scenes in oil and intimate sculptures seem at home here, and yet suggest a sensibility that seeks



94. *Rochas mermaid dress (Lisa Fonssagrives-Penn)*, by Irving Penn. 1950. Platinum-palladium print, 50.5 by 50 cm. (Promised gift of the Irving Penn Foundation to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; exh. Grand Palais, Paris).

a broader world than this. A case in point is one of the most provocative sculptures in the show: a small casket (no.9; Fig.96) that houses a carved lifeless body, yet which is decorated with active Degas-like dancers and inlaid with two small amusing netsuke masks. This idiosyncractic amalgam – perhaps a meditation on the transience of life and beauty? – is composed of pearwood, iron hinges and leather patches and embellished with Japanese carvings. It is a clarion announcement of the creative bricolage of forms and materials that is, we quickly see, quintessentially Gauguin.

A third gallery plunges into the mid-1880s, when Gauguin simultaneously pursued a new passion for ceramics along with experimentation in printmaking and in cloissonist painting. Sculpted wood objects range from decorated sabots (nos.45 and 49) to a cane (no.50), a cask (no.73) and a humble cupboard decorated boldly in polychrome by Gauguin and Emile Bernard (no.69). But the walls also sing with colour: the canary yellow lithographs in the Volpini series (nos.57 and 65) and the deeply saturated red field that was the signature break-through of *Vision of the sermon (Jacob wrestling with the angel)* (no.66). One's eye is drawn to the sculptural forms of the Breton headdresses in that painting through its juxtaposition with two of the starchy cotton headdresses themselves (nos.67–68). Such clever plays between two and three dimensions occur throughout the show, informing us of the tastes of Gauguin's omnivorous eye as he surveyed the world around him in Brittany or Polynesia and then turned to rethink forms available to him in the studio, the sketchbook and his imagination.

Four short videos demonstrate techniques the artist used in prints, monotypes, ceramics and transfer drawings; one needs this knowledge to fully appreciate the range of work on view. The seventh gallery offers an expansive overview of the origins and reworkings of signature motifs in Gauguin's *Noa Noa* woodblock print suite, ranging from iterations in watercolours, monotypes and oil paintings to the expressive prints themselves. Remarkably, seven of the eight extant woodblocks from the *Noa Noa* series are on display in both venues.

The catalogue adds much to Gauguin scholarship.² Notable essays include an ambitious overview of Gauguin studies by Gloria Groom, an exploration of Gauguin's creativity as akin to alchemy by Dario Gamboni, insights into the artist's radical experiments in printmaking by the conservator Harriet Stratis, a rigorously researched account of Gauguin's Paris studio of 1894–95 by Allison Perelman and a highly useful chronology that charts Gauguin's materials and methods. In designing any catalogue of this scope, hard choices must be made, but it is a pity that more of the sculptures and ceramics could not be shown in multiple views and details.

There is much to absorb in this Chicago presentation of Gauguin's art, particularly since about ten per cent of the works will not



96. *Resurrection sarcophagus-like casket*, by Paul Gauguin. 1884–85. Pearwood with iron hinges, leather and red stain, inlaid with two netsuke masks, 21 by 51.4 by 13 cm. (The Kelton Foundation, Santa Monica; exh. Art Institute of Chicago).

travel to Paris, including key objects in stoneware, on paper and painted on glass. Similarly, the Parisian visitor will encounter some remarkable works that go only to the Grand Palais – notably stoneware pieces, six masterpieces from Russian collections and key sculptures from the Marquesan period. All of which is to say that the most fortunate viewers will be the ones who follow in the peripatetic steps of Gauguin himself, and prioritise travel to gain both perspective and ideas. A journey to both venues will be worth it.

¹ The 2003 exhibition was reviewed by Colin Rhodes in this Magazine, 146 (2003), pp.125–27. For the 2011 exhibition, see S. Greub, ed.: exh.

cat. *Gauguin: Polynesia*, Copenhagen (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek) and Seattle (Art Museum).

² Catalogue: *Gauguin: Artist as Alchemist*. Edited by Gloria Groom, with contributions by Claire Bernardi, Isabelle Cahn, Ophélie Ferlier-Bouat, Dario Gamboni, Allison Perelman and Harriet Stratis. 336 pp. incl. 408 col. ills. (Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, 2017), \$65. ISBN 978-0-300-21701-8. French edition: *Gauguin l'alchimiste*. Edited by Claire Bernardi and Ferlier-Bouat. 328 pp. incl. 302 col. + b. & w. ills. (Réunion des musées nationaux and Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 2017), €45. ISBN 978-2-7118-6435-5. The catalogue often builds on the superbly researched online catalogue of Gauguin's works at the Art Institute of Chicago, available at <https://www.artic.edu/digitalgauguin>, accessed 25th July 2017.