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**"GAUGUIN: MAKER OF MYTH" SHEDS NEW LIGHT ON ARTIST AND CAREER AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON. SOLE U.S. VENUE****Paul Gauguin*****No te aha oe riri? (Why are you Angry?), 1896***

oil on canvas

95.3 x 130.5 cm (37 1/2 x 51 3/8 in.)

The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection

Washington, DC—Paul Gauguin's (1848–1903) sumptuous, colorful images of Brittany and the islands of the South Seas, some of the most beloved in modern art, are among 100 works by the artist in the first major exhibition of his career in the United States in some 20 years. On view from February 27 through June 5, 2011, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington—the sole U.S. venue—the exhibition ***Gauguin: Maker of Myth***, along with its accompanying catalogue, examines the role that myth-making played in Gauguin's art, shedding new light on his life and career.

The exhibition reflects the remarkable breadth of Gauguin's work with examples from every period (c. 1880–1903), medium (painting, watercolor, pastel, drawing, and prints, ceramic and wooden sculpture, and decorated functional objects), and genre (portraiture, still life, and landscape).

***Gauguin: Maker of Myth*** was organized by Tate Modern, London, where it is on view through January 16, 2011, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

"Gauguin's use of stories and myth throughout his career continues to mesmerize audiences worldwide, and visitors to this exhibition will see through the many examples exhibited why he was one of the most important artists behind European modernism," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "This fascinating reappraisal of his career would not be possible without the generosity of lenders, both public and private, from around the world."

### **Exhibition Support**

Bank of America is proud to be the global sponsor.

The Marshall B. Coyne Foundation is a generous supporter through the Fund for the International Exchange of Art.

Additional support is provided by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

### **The Exhibition**

***Gauguin: Maker of Myth*** is organized around the most significant themes that pervade his created myths: artist as creator, the quest for spirituality, the search for an earthly paradise (and discovery of a paradise lost), re-creation of the past, archetypal females, and religious commonalities. Gauguin's myth-making drew from his own imagination as well as a wide range of European and non-Western sources, such as biblical literature, contemporary French poetry, Oceanic legends, Buddhism, and Hinduism. These themes interweave with one another throughout the exhibition, following Gauguin as he moved from one locale to another, explored different media, and as his knowledge of other cultures broadened.

**Artist as creator:** The exhibition opens with a series of powerful self-portraits, including *Christ in the Garden of Olives* (1889), *Self-Portrait Vase in the Form of a Severed Head* (1889), and the *Gallery's Self-Portrait* (1889), which present Gauguin's talent for role-playing as he adopts different identities of victim, saint, Christ-like martyr, sinner, and savage. Seen together, they suggest Gauguin's portrayal of himself as a heroic artist in search of deeper truths.

**Quest for spirituality:** Religious stories and imagery permeate Gauguin's work, but they appeared first in his Breton paintings. Deeply influenced by the intense spiritual atmosphere of Brittany, Gauguin responded with the experimental and highly personal *Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)* (1888)—the first of his works where color and space are radically different from reality. Despite rejections by the local clergy, Gauguin continued to depict the Passion, set amidst 19th-century Breton life, seen in *The Yellow Christ* (1889).

**Earthly Paradise/Paradise lost:** Lured to Tahiti in 1891 by reports of its unspoiled culture, Gauguin was disappointed upon arrival to discover the changes colonialism had brought to its capital of Papeete. Hoping to find a more authentic environment, he moved to the countryside and began painting the Tahiti of his dreams, replete with beautiful women, colorful flowers, and lush greenery—a world of tropical languor, the earthly Paradise he had hoped to find. Using titles rendered in Tahitian to emphasize a sense of exoticism and mystery, Gauguin poses questions through his art, as in the painting *Aha oe feii? (What! Are You Jealous?)* (1892).

**Re-creating the past:** The loss of ancient Polynesian culture deeply saddened Gauguin, who mourned the demise of a culture he never knew. *Arii Matamoe (The Royal End)* (1892) memorializes the death of the last Tahitian king, Pomare V, who died within days of Gauguin's arrival in Tahiti. With the royal's head dramatically displayed on a white cushion, the painting celebrates the "noble savage" and is a lament for the passing of an entire culture.

Confronted with the reality of disappearing Polynesian traditions, Gauguin turned to his art to re-create the gods, myths, and rituals that colonialism had replaced. He drew upon Western accounts of Tahitian culture, religious art of other cultures, and his own imagination to create sacred objects representing lost deities and religious practices, as seen in the relief carving *Hina and Fatu* (c. 1892), depicting a moon goddess and an earth god, and the painting of a temple ground in *Parahi te Marae (There Are the Temple Grounds)* (1892).

**Archetypal females:** Mythical females dominate much of Gauguin's art. Taken from sources as diverse as Christian parables, Polynesian myths, German folklore, ancient Peruvian burial practices, Hinduism, Buddhism, and his own imagination, the women in Gauguin's art are both seductive and destructive.

His Tahitian mistress served as a model for many of his works, most notably the famous *Manao tupapau (The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch)* (1892), where she is transformed into a recumbent Eve

menaced by a ghostly spirit, or *tupapau* In *Te Nave Nave Fenua (The Delightful Land)* (1892), Gauguin again renders a Tahitian Eve, with her Garden of Eden transformed into a tropical forest, and the snake into a lizard. The monstrous female *Oviri* ("savage"), wholly constructed from Gauguin's imagination, represents his imagining of crushingly powerful womanhood. Gauguin counted his stoneware sculpture *Oviri* (1894) among his most important works, requesting that it be placed on his tombstone.

**Religious commonalities:** Gauguin's lifelong quest for spiritual harmony led him to look for connections among religions. In his art, Eastern and Western traditions intermingle, with Christianity freely mixing with Oceanic religions, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The subjects Gauguin approached, including creation, death, self-identity, dreams, and the longing for paradise, are addressed across different cultures. His beautiful, enigmatic compositions, such as *Te Faaturuma (The Brooding Woman)* (1892), *Te Rerioa (The Dream)* (1897), and *Faa Iheihe (To Make Beautiful)* (1898) have a contemplative quality; the questions they pose, like so much of Gauguin's art, remain unanswered.

### **Curators, Catalogue, and Documentary Film**

The National Gallery of Art has produced a 30-minute film that provides an overview of Gauguin's career and travels and explores the myths reflected in his paintings, sculpture, ceramics, and prints. Available in February 2011, the film will be shown at the Gallery and on PBS stations and can be purchased through the Gallery Shops.

The guest curator of the exhibition is Belinda Thomson, independent art historian and honorary fellow at the University of Edinburgh. The coordinator in Washington is Mary Morton, curator of French paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Published by Princeton University Press, the fully illustrated exhibition catalogue features essays by Thomson, in addition to Philippe Dagen, Sorbonne; Charles Forsdick, University of Liverpool; Tamar Garb, University College London; Vincent Gilles, Pavillon des Arts, Paris; and Linda Goddard, University of St. Andrews. The catalogue will be available for purchase in the Gallery Shops. To order, visit the Web site at [shop.nga.gov](http://shop.nga.gov); call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

### **General Information**

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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