

Into unknown lands

Paul Gauguin has long been regarded as one of the leading figures in the development of modern art. *Jo Caird* explores his influence on modern contemporaries, and why he wasn't fully appreciated until after his death

Paul Gauguin's influence on the work of Picasso and Matisse is widely acknowledged, and his paintings hang in galleries around the world alongside Paul Cézanne and Vincent Van Gogh. Yet it wasn't until after his death in 1903, when a new generation of artists took significant notice of his work, that Gauguin began to receive the recognition he deserved.

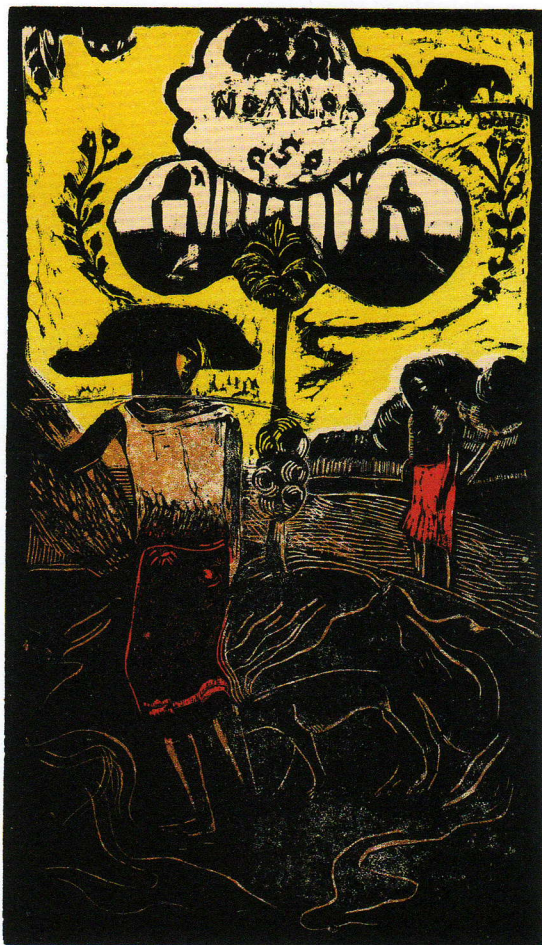
What excited visitors to the important posthumous retrospectives held in Paris in the years after his death was his representation of the 'primitive'. He spent a decade living in French Polynesia in the South Pacific, which saw the artist's work become suffused with tropical pastoral imagery and symbols of Tahitian folklore. The philosophy behind primitivism has been much criticised by postcolonial theorists, but the movement's impact on 20th Century art cannot be underestimated.

Two shows in Europe explore Gauguin's contribution to this field of work. *Paul Gauguin – The Prints*, which opened at the Kunsthhaus Zurich in September, focused on his print-making; a branch of the artist's practice inextricably tied to his exploration of foreign cultures, while *Gauguin and the Voyage to the Exotic* locates the artist in the wider context of primitivism, and considers the influence of this period on his work in later art movements.

In search of inspiration

In 1891, following short periods spent in Brittany, Panama and Martinique, the artist travelled to Tahiti for the first time. Estranged from his family and suffering from intermittent bouts of depression, he was seeking a refuge from modern life and found it in the apparently idyllic lifestyle of French Polynesia. Gauguin came back to France after two years but in 1895 returned to the South Seas, living there – first in Tahiti then in the Marqueses Islands – until his death in 1903.

Paul Gauguin – The Prints comprised three sets of prints: the first, known as the Volpini Suite from the exhibition at the Monsieur Volpini's Café des Arts in 1889 where it was displayed, draws on the artist's trips to



Left: Paul Gauguin 'Human misery' (Misères humaines), 1898-1899

Above: Paul Gauguin, Haere mai (Wenid) 1891

Brittany and the Caribbean. Produced using conventional lithographic printing methods, the prints reference Gauguin's post-impressionist paintings and other works from this period.

The later two sets of prints, woodcuts made during and after Gauguin's 'discovery' of Tahiti, show a very different sensibility at play. Tobia Bezzola, curator of the Zurich show, sees the final decade of Gauguin's life as an attempt "to go back to the wild" and believes that the woodcuts are best understood in this context, allowing the artist to experiment not only with subject – as he was doing so successfully in his paintings – but also with technique.

Bezzola explains, "He experimented with printing techniques, with colours. With the woodcuts he really discovered a way where

he could work, act and be more like somebody who had not been tainted and jeopardised by civilisation too much. It allowed him to be wild again, to go to a level of non-culturedness, of a self-taught experimental approach to art."

Pioneering culture

Paloma Alarcó, curator of the wider-ranging Madrid show of the artist's work, regards Gauguin as "a kind of pioneer" in the development of primitivism. *Gauguin and the Voyage to the Exotic* featured 110 pieces by Gauguin – mainly paintings, but some graphic works too, including a selection of paintings by German expressionists and French fauves influenced by Gauguin. These artists, Alarcó says, responded to the "simple forms" and "bright colours" in the painter's later work. They were also inspired by his portrayal of man's relationship with nature. Alarcó draws attention to the mystic content of Gauguin's work, an aspect we get a strong sense of when reading *Noa Noa*, the memoir he wrote of his first period in Tahiti.

Gauguin's intention was for this short, rhapsodic account of his travels to be published as an accompaniment to the series of 10 woodcuts he made

following his return from his first trip to the South Seas. That never happened, and the critical response to the artist's self-published version of the memoir was mixed, but this should not taint the spirit of what this artistic innovator was trying to achieve, and poetically states: "All the joys – animal and human – of a free life are mine. I have escaped everything that is artificial, conventional, customary. I am entering into the truth, into nature."

Paul Gauguin – The Prints runs at the Kunsthhaus Zurich, Switzerland until 20 January 2013.

Visit kunsthhaus.ch

Gauguin and the Voyage to the Exotic runs at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza until 13 January 2013.

Visit museothyssen.org

Further exhibitions:

There are plenty more worthwhile exhibitions taking place across the European art scene, including an Edward Hopper retrospective in Madrid and Yoko Ono at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm



EGON SCHIELE

Egon Schiele died at the age of just 28, but produced an astonishing number of works over the course of such a short life, including over 2,500 works on paper. With his innovative treatment of the nude, interest in self-portraiture and exciting early forays into expressionism, Schiele was a major influence on the art of early 20th Century Vienna and beyond. The show features nearly 100 drawings, gouaches, watercolours and photographs on loan from the Albertina Museum in Vienna.

Egon Schiele from the Albertina Museum, Vienna runs at the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain until 6 January 2013. Visit guggenheim-bilbao.es

Above: Egon Schiele, 'Two Crouching Girls', 1911

Right: Egon Schiele, 'Self-Portrait in Yellow Vest', 1914



PAUL KLEE AND ITALY

While art historians have examined Paul Klee's travels in Tunisia and Egypt in depth, acknowledging their influence on his development as an artist and in particular on his use of colour, Italy's impact on Klee's work has been little explored. This exhibition seeks to redress the balance, providing systematic analysis of the hugely influential painter's relationship with the Bel Paese through paintings and graphic work.

Paul Klee and Italy runs at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, Italy until 27 January 2013.



Left Paul Klee, 'Mazzarò' 1924

ALEX KATZ

The largest ever exhibition of American artist Alex Katz is held in Austria, and covers a period of 35 years to include 30 paintings, drawings, preparatory sketches in oil and 'cartoons'. Known for his startlingly simple, stylised large-scale portraits and landscapes, Katz was one of the pioneers of the Pop Art movement in the 1960s. The works show the artist's development as a painter, and sheds light on the new painting technique championed by Katz.

Alex Katz runs at the Essl Museum, Vienna, Austria to 6 January 2013.
Visit essl.museum



Right Alex Katz, 'Black Brook 8', 1990