

Avant et après: Gauguin's Final Words

Friday 23rd June and Saturday 24th June 2023

Abstracts and Biographies

Claire Bernardi

A curatorial point of view: how to exhibit Gauguin today?

How to exhibit Gauguin nowadays. Based on my experience as a former chief curator for paintings at the musée d'Orsay, as well as curator of a large-scale exhibition on Gauguin at the Grand Palais (2017-18), this talk will ask questions more than it will give firm answers: how recent studies on Gauguin have an impact on the ways we could (we should) exhibit his artworks in our museums? What do we learn from the temporary exhibitions that we could integrate into the permanent collections in our museums? Is there (still) a distinctive approach on Gauguin's art and life in European and American institutions?

Since February 2022, Claire Bernardi has been the director and chief curator of the musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. Formerly chief curator at the musée d'Orsay, Paris, she was notably in charge of works by Paul Gauguin and other artists from the Pont-Aven School. She previously held the position of curator at the Centre national des arts plastiques. Selected exhibition highlights include *Edvard Munch, A poem of life, love and death* (Musée d'Orsay, 2022); *Sérusier's "Talisman", a prophecy of colour* (Musée d'Orsay, 2019); *PICASSO: Bleu et rose* (Musée d'Orsay, 2018); *Gauguin L'Alchimiste* (Grand Palais, Paris, 2017-18); *Douanier Rousseau. L'innocence archaïque*, (Musée d'Orsay 2015); and *Allegro Barbaro, Béla Bartók and Hungarian Modernity 1905-1920* (Musée d'Orsay, 2013-14).

Professor Elizabeth Childs

Dual voices of Gauguin's late career: 'Avant et après' and 'L'esprit moderne et le Catholicisme' compared.

This paper compares two late manuscripts by Gauguin: *Avant et Après*, and *L'esprit moderne et le Catholicisme* (the latter in the collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum). The two may be thought of as complementary summative projects of Gauguin's mature creative and philosophical life—written to set out his ideas for French art world readers. *L'esprit moderne...* comprises a philosophical exploration of the relationship between world religions, a meditation on the origins of the human soul, and a critique of the social and political institutions of the Church and marriage, as administered by French colonial authorities. My talk considers both the significance of the illustrated covers, and the broad philosophical range of the text. I explore the provenance of the St. Louis manuscript (comparing it to that of *Avant et*

Après). I also will share the news of the imminent publication of the transcription and translation of this manuscript on-line, later this summer.

Elizabeth Childs is the Etta and Mark Steinberg Professor, in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Washington University in St Louis. USA. Her publications on Gauguin have appeared in many journals and museum catalogues including the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the National Gallery, and the Musée Quai Branly. Her *Vanishing Paradise: Art and Exoticism in Colonial Tahiti* (University of California Press) appeared in 2014. She has been working in recent years with the Saint Louis Art Museum on a collaborative on-line presentation of Gauguin's manuscript "L'esprit moderne et le Catholicisme" (the first stage of publication will come early this fall). She is currently researching a book, *The Gauguin Effect* (for Yale U Press), which considers global legacies, and a broad range of political, critical and artistic receptions of Gauguin's art and life by both Euro-Americans and Polynesians from 1903 to the present.

Dr Cathy Corbett

'Flesh is flesh and spirit is spirit'. Some observations on Gauguin's references to religion(s) in Avant et après.

The religious references in *Avant et après* confirm what is already known about Gauguin's attitude to religion, but also suggest that he may have been more interested in the philosophy linked to an early second century Christian heresy than has previously been recognised. This paper analyses Gauguin's references to religion and considers whether Gauguin's twice quoting of the words from John's Gospel "flesh is flesh and spirit is spirit" hints at an interest in Gnosticism, which was loosely allied with Theosophy but also enjoying a resurgence of popularity in Paris after the re-establishment of the Gnostic Church there in 1890.

Cathy Corbett read Theology at the University of Oxford, and subsequently studied History of Art at Reading University and The Courtauld. Her PhD at The Courtauld was completed under the supervision of Professor Christopher Green and focused on the works in wood of the twentieth century sculptor Ossip Zadkine. She has published on Zadkine's sculpture, and her essay on Modigliani's sculpture was included in the catalogue for the 2017 *Modigliani* exhibition at Tate. Currently, Cathy is the Research Assistant for The Courtauld's *Avant & Après* project.

Dr Elise Eckermann

Riding Lesson with Guardian Angel: Drawings from Avant et après and corresponding paintings.

Based on the two drawings *En route pour le festin* and *Les ailes sont lourdes* and the transfer drawing *Changement de résidence* in *Avant et après*, this paper presents Paul Gauguin's two paintings *Group with an Angel* (Prague) and *Composition with Figures and a Horse* (Stockholm), created in the same period as the manuscript on Hiva Oa.

In cross-genre comparison with other works that share a similar subject, different interpretations of the content will be proposed. At the same time the close connection of these two paintings, which were known under various titles in the course of their history, will be shown.

Elise Eckermann studied art history in Bonn, Brussels and Lyon. With research stays abroad in Paris and London, she focused on 19th century art in France, specializing in Paul Gauguin. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Bonn on Paul Gauguin im Spannungsfeld von Kunstkritik und Kunstmarkt (P.G. in the field of art criticism and art market). She lives in Frankfurt and works as an independent art historian. Elise Eckermann is a principal co-author of *Gauguin in the South Seas*, forthcoming with Taschen Verlag, Cologne.

Kate Edmondsom and Dr Rachel Hapoienu

Material evidence and technical aspects of the manuscript.

This joint paper first examines the provenance of the manuscript *Avant et Après*, tracing its history from leaving Gauguin's hands in 1903 until its arrival at The Courtauld in 2020. Aspects of the manuscript are compared to the 1918 German facsimile to demonstrate how the condition of the book has changed over the past century. The second part of the paper explores the physical characteristics of the manuscript's binding, evidence of past interventions, and the types of papers Gauguin used for the manuscript and its integral transfer drawings.

Kate Edmondson is Paper Conservator at The Courtauld. Kate studied at Camberwell College of Arts, London, and previously worked at the Library of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, as well as freelance paper conservator for the National Trust and The Ashmolean Museum. Most recently she has contributed to *Parmigianino The Art of Experiment catalogue* (2022) and *Rembrandt's Marks - The Materials of Drawing* (Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, 2019).

Rachel Hapoienu is the IMAF Drawings Cataloguer at The Courtauld. Rachel earned her Phd from The Courtauld with a thesis on *The marginal image cycle in the Irish works by Gerald of Wales* (2016). She contributed to the publication *Drawn from the Antique: artists & the classical ideal* (2015) and to the editing of the forthcoming revised edition of the *Taste of the Antique*. At The Courtauld she has curated the display *Reading drawings* (2017) and co-curated *Art and Artifice: Fakes from the Collection* (2023).

Professor June Hargrove

Between Avant et Après.

Avant et Après is an idiosyncratic anthology of Gauguin's experiences, texts, anecdotes, and ideas presented in a non-linear sequence. Because few of the segments have a direct relationship to a specific artwork, the assumption has been that there is no correlation. However, taking a broader view offers new insights on other ways to evaluate this complicated manuscript. Gauguin refers pointedly to five of his fellow artists: Van Gogh, Degas, Cézanne, Puvis, and Manet. While this reveals their influence on him, it also corresponds to his goal of mapping his artistic trajectory. He worried that his achievements would be forgotten. To remedy this, he picked up his pen and his brush to ensure his rightful place as a "new link in the chain already begun."

June Hargrove, Professor Emerita of the University of Maryland, earned her Ph.D. in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. An authority on French art, she has published internationally on sculpture and painting, including numerous works on Gauguin. She is editor and co-author of a forthcoming publication on *Gauguin in the South Seas* for Taschen Verlag, Cologne. She received France's Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters and was recognized by The College Art Association as the Distinguished Teacher of Art History.

Dr Monika Hinkel

Gauguin and Three Japanese Beauties

Three Japanese prints of beauties, *bijin-ga* in Japanese, were pasted prominently by Gauguin inside the front and back covers of *Avant et après*. All three prints were designed by the Japanese print artist Utagawa Kunisada (1786-1865). He is regarded as the most prolific and commercially successful Ukiyo-e (Pictures of the Floating World) artists of the Edo period (1603-1868). Kunisada who was famous for producing innovative portraits of Kabuki actors and depictions of beauties will be briefly introduced. The talk will then investigate who the three beauties are, will look

closely at their garments, the overall settings they are depicted in and will conclude with a discussion on why Gauguin was fascinated by them.

Dr Monika Hinkel is Lecturer in the Arts of Japan in the School of Arts at SOAS. She has worked as a Curator for Japanese art at the Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne and was Guest Researcher at Gakushuin University, Tokyo. She co-authored 'The Changing Face of Toyohara Kunichika' in *A Courtesan's Day: Hour by Hour* and was a contributor to the *Hotei Encyclopedia of Japanese Woodblock Prints*. Her research focuses on Japanese woodblock prints, the notion of nostalgia in prints and the impact of prints on contemporary art.

Professor Linda Goddard

Avant et après and the Artist's Autobiography.

Avant et Après is perhaps the closest of Gauguin's writings to a conventional autobiography, although he himself resisted the label, saying "This is not a book, nor is it my memoirs". In this talk, I consider Gauguin's manuscript as a work of literary self-fashioning and relate it to a wider tradition of artists' autobiographies, and biographical writing, which he both alludes to and resists.

Linda Goddard is Professor of Art History at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. She is the author of *Aesthetic Rivalries: Word and Image in France, 1880-1926* (Peter Lang, 2012) and *Savage Tales: The Writings of Paul Gauguin* (Yale University Press, 2019). She has worked extensively on artists' writings, and her essays on Gauguin have appeared in the catalogues of exhibitions including *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* (Tate Modern, 2010); *Gauguin: Portraits* (National Gallery, London, and National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 2019-20); and *Gauguin: The Other and I* (São Paulo Museum of Art, 2023).

Yuki Kihara

Paradise Camp.

The intersectionality between gender roles, representation (and misrepresentation), climate change and the lasting impacts of colonialism on the Pacific are some of the themes explored, dismantled and recreated in 'Paradise Camp' – a solo exhibition by Yuki Kihara which debut at the 59th Venice Biennale last year. Kihara is of Japanese, Sāmoan and fa'afafine – a culturally recognised third gender community in Sāmoa referring to people who were assigned male at birth who express their gender in a feminine manner. 'Paradise Camp' came about after Kihara recognised aspects of the fa'afafine community and Sāmoa more widely in post-Impressionist works by Paul Gauguin. By repurposing and upcycling Gauguin's classic works which Kihara believes to have been inspired by Sāmoa, 'Paradise Camp' draws

attention to how colonialism has impacted the fa'afafine community and misconceptions surrounding the Pacific Islands.

Yuki Kihara is an interdisciplinary artist of Japanese and Sāmoan descent. Through a research-based approach, her work seeks to challenge dominant and singular historical narratives through a wide range of mediums, including performance, sculpture, video, photography and curatorial practice. Kihara lives and works in Sāmoa, where she has been based over the past 12 years. Among many exhibitions Kihara has presented over the past two decades includes a solo, acquisitive exhibition entitled 'Living Photographs' (2008) presented at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Manhattan New York which featured highlights of her art practice. Her works were recently presented at the Aichi Triennale (2022) and the Gwangju Biennale (2023). Kihara's critically acclaimed exhibition entitled 'Paradise Camp' (2022) curated by Natalie King held at the Aotearoa New Zealand Pavilion presented at the 59th Venice Biennale is currently touring the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo, Gadigal land Sydney Australia. It will subsequently tour the Saletoga Sands Resort in Upolu Island Sāmoa in 2024; and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich United Kingdom in 2025. www.yukikihara.ws

Professor Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega

Peeps and gossips on the Marquesas: Gauguin's Avant et Après, a palimpsest of Melville's Typee?

In *Avant et après* (as in *Noa Noa*), Gauguin may strike readers as a "Savage" up in arms against Western "civilisation". Referring to postcolonial and literary studies, this presentation aims to qualify this approach by arguing that—given that palimpsests were a key mode of Western writing about the South Pacific—*Avant et Après* may be seen as a palimpsest of Herman Melville's *Typee*, *A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1946), a literary canon on the Marquesas. It compares Gauguin and Melville's primitivistic, romantic and Enlightened topoi, and looks into the authors' attempts to distance themselves from these topoi. Its purpose is to assess to what extent "rebellious" Gauguin might "be in line" with his literary predecessor.

Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega is Professor at the University of French Polynesia and Chair of the English Department. Her fields of expertise are postcolonial studies. She has published extensively on Anglophone literatures and societies in Oceania. Her latest monograph is *Orientalisme ou Défi Postcolonial? Le cas de L'Âme des Guerriers d'Alan Duff* (Paris: Honoré Champion, Nov 2021). She's currently editing a collective volume, *Mysteries and Dreams: the French in Oceania*, which includes several chapters on Gauguin's works (Wilmington: Vernon Press, forthcoming).

Dr Caroline Levitt

Idle chatter, or writing instead of talking: Language and (un)certainty in Gauguin's Text and Image

'What can I say to all these coconut trees? And yet I need to chat; so I write instead of talking.' (Gauguin, *Avant et Après*, p.4)

Throughout his final manuscript, Gauguin adopts a self-conscious language of 'chatter': an insistence on the improvised spoken word, committed to paper through the written and depicted, with titles found 'long afterwards'. This paper seeks to examine the relationship between word, text and image across Gauguin's manuscript and his painted output. Whilst we may not be able to read the images inserted into *Avant et Après* as conventional illustrations, I argue that they serve a function of equivalence for Gauguin, contributing to a vocabulary and language of repetition, contradiction, translation, quotation and exchange that is at the heart of his insistent ambiguity in all media.

Caroline Levitt is Senior Lecturer and Head of the History of Art department at The Courtauld. She specialises in French art and literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and has a particular interest in relationships between text and image/object in the broadest sense. Recent publications include an article on text and textuality in the tapestries of Le Corbusier and Jean Lurcat; a contribution to a book on Picasso's *Guernica* (published by the Picasso Museum, Malaga) and an essay for the catalogue of the 2022 Munch exhibition at The Courtauld.

Giacomo Nericì

In Hiva oa: Gauguin and the Marquesan art

In this contribution I will attempt to consider Gauguin's artistic and biographical parenthesis in the Marquesas in order to reflect on some of his indigenous interlocutors and the expressions of their art. Despite the fact that discourse on cultural loss and oblivion was prevalent in the archipelago in those decades, handicrafts continued to 'survive' for domestic purposes, but also related to a small tourist market. In short, this was a trade tolerated by the political and religious authorities and made possible thanks to a few companies through which Gauguin himself sold his works. What objects were therefore carved locally? Using which techniques? And, more generally, what was the state of Marquesan art when Gauguin reached Hiva oa at the beginning of 20th century?

Giacomo Nericì is a PhD candidate in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Milano-Bicocca. His research interests have focused, on the one hand, on indigenous claims and uses of the past among the Sami (Northern Norway) and,

on the another, on processes of rediscovery of traditions within the cultural and artistic 'awakening' in the Marquesas Islands.

Dr Rachel Sloan

An epistolary friendship: Paul Gauguin and André Fontainas.

This paper looks at Gauguin's relationship with the dedicatee of *Avant et après*, the Franco-Belgian Symbolist poet André Fontainas, through the lens of their correspondence in the final years of Gauguin's life. It examines the reasons for their epistolary friendship as well as why Gauguin chose Fontainas as a somewhat unlikely literary agent for his final manuscript, and finally considers the consequences of Fontainas's failure to publish the manuscript himself after the artist's death.

Dr Rachel Sloan is Assistant Curator of Works on Paper at The Courtauld. She earned her PhD from The Courtauld with a thesis on Symbolism and artistic exchange between France and England, and has worked at the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. She has curated numerous exhibitions and displays, including, most recently, *Impressions of Modern Life: Prints from the Courtauld Collection* (Royal Holloway, University of London, 2020) and *Helen Saunders: Modernist Rebel* (The Courtauld Gallery, 2022-23).

Harriet Stratis

Experimental Pragmatism: Gauguin's Transfer Drawing Techniques

Gauguin used black ink and graphite to draw directly onto some of the pages of *Avant et après* interspersing his drawings with text in discrete parts of the manuscript. He also included more unconventional drawings that he adhered onto blank pages at selected intervals. In the art historical literature these unconventional drawings are often called monotypes. However, given the manner in which Gauguin made them and his own reference to them as drawings, they can also be more accurately described as transfer drawings. This talk will discuss the recent scientific investigation that elucidated the manner in which Gauguin made his transfer drawings, as well as evidence that reveals the artist produced many, if not all, of those in *Avant et après* specifically with this manuscript in mind.

Harriet Stratis, paper conservator and technical art historian, brings over three decades of experience to her practice. She holds degrees in art history and conservation, and was the head of paper conservation, then senior research conservator at the Art Institute of Chicago, before turning to private practice in 2017. Since then she was invited to be the Praska Distinguished Visiting Professor at

New York University, and a Getty Museum visiting scholar. She now teaches at the University of Chicago.

Dr Nicholas Thomas

Changement de résidence: Gauguin's painting 1901-1903

Notwithstanding the celebrated or notorious status of Gauguin's final move to Atuona, Hiva Oa, his art from the last year and a half of his life has received little attention relative to the works from the second period in Tahiti. This talk argues that, for all their eclecticism, Gauguin's Hiva Oa paintings engaged in novel ways with place and milieu.

Nicholas Thomas visited the Pacific first in 1984 to undertake research in the Marquesas Islands. He has since travelled extensively in Oceania and worked on archives and collections across Europe and north America and in the region itself. He is author or editor of over fifty influential books, including *Entangled Objects* (1991), *Possessions: Indigenous Art/Colonial Culture* (1999) and *Islanders: the Pacific in the age of empire* (2010), which was awarded the Wolfson History Prize; and several books in collaboration with contemporary Pacific artists including Mark Adams, John Pule and Lyonel Grant. He writes regularly for the Financial Times, The Art Newspaper, Apollo, and Art Asia Pacific.

'Oceania', which Thomas co-curated with Peter Brunt for the Royal Academy of Arts in London and the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac in Paris in 2018-19 was acclaimed as landmark exhibition by critics across major newspapers in Britain, France, Germany and the United States, as well as in Pacific nations themselves. Since 2006, he has been Director of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Professor Belinda Thomson

Pour Rire, Pour Vivre, Pour Jouir': Some reflections on the character and role of humour in Gauguin's Avant et après.

Gauguin's text, *Avant et après*, a collage of memories, opinions, autobiography and anecdotes with apparently little interconnectedness, is laced with humour from the front cover to the contents. It quite often turns out to be Gauguin's sense of the ridiculous that leads his mind from one topic or reminiscence to the next. At the outset he asserted his intention to make frequent oppositions between the serious and the waggish. This paper looks at the character of his humour – often a form of *fumisterie* - and tries to understand its purposes. Frequently offensive by today's standards, Gauguin's humour was deliberately provocative in his own time. So whom was he addressing? And what was the context for his style of humour?

Belinda Thomson (Courtauld MA 1976), Honorary Professor at the University of Edinburgh, is an art historian specialising in French art of the turn of the 20th century. Her publications include books such as *Gauguin* (1987, rev. 2020), *Gauguin by Himself* (1993), and exhibition catalogues: *Gauguin's Vision* (NGS, Edinburgh 2005); *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* (Tate Modern, London and NGA, Washington, 2010-11). As 2023 Van Gogh Visiting Fellow at the Van Gogh Museum and the University of Amsterdam, her topic is Curating their Legacies: the Packaging and Presentation of Van Gogh and Gauguin.

Dr Caroline Vercoe

'Where are We Going?' Reflecting on Gauguin's Legacy in the Pacific.

For decades contemporary indigenous artists in the Pacific have been responding to Paul Gauguin's life, work and legacy. This paper compares the painting practices of New Zealand Samoan artist Graham Fletcher and Māori artist Nephi Tupaea in relation to their responses to Gauguin's art and legacy. Striking stylistic affinities belie their contrasting intentions, as Fletcher's early 2000s series *Virgins DPM* named after disruptive patterned material used in military camouflage uniforms, literally covers Gauguin's 'Dusky Maiden' figures with an array of bright patterned cloth, against contrasting backgrounds. Describing his art practice at this time as a "camouflage aesthetic", the artist attempts to 'cover up' and protect the women, hiding them from the gaze. "My painterly camouflage" he states, "offers the women a degree of anonymity and dignity that has hitherto been denied them." Tupaea's patterned overlay paintings of Gauguin's famous female forms in contrast, cloaks them with whakapapa (genealogy) and mana (ancestral and spiritual power and authority) by 'covering them up' with the striking coloured forms of Māori painted kowhaiwhai. This ancient painting practice is usually situated in the rafters of whare whakairo (carved meeting houses), but is deployed by Tupaea in a process that both connects her to her whakapapa and reflects her personal journey. Tupaea has been exploring the practice of Gauguin for over twenty years. His statuesque representations of Polynesian women and his innovative, symbolic colour palette has offered Tupaea an entry point in the development of her own Māori painting practice.

Dr Caroline Vercoe is a Senior Lecturer in Art History at the University of Auckland. She is the first Pacific woman to graduate with a PhD in Art History from the University of Auckland. She specialises in contemporary Pacific art and performance art, with a particular interest in issues of race, gender and representation, and has been teaching, curating and researching in these areas for over twenty years.