

PAUL GAUGUIN

Paul Gauguin was born in Paris on June 7th, 1848. When he was one year old, his father, a politics journalist, went to Peru with his family by ship, but died on the trip. However, thanks to some rich people his mom knew in Lima, Gauguin spent the first seven years of his life in that country, before going back to Paris in 1855. At seventeen, Gauguin joined the Merchant Navy. In his five years on the sea, he got to the position of Second-Lieutenant and visited Panama and the Pacific, the tropical places that always followed his thoughts.

In 1871, Gauguin returned to Paris, where an affluent family friend got him a job as a stock broker. He spent the next decade as a respectable businessman, marrying a Danish girl, Mette Sophie Gad, who he had five kids with.

In the beginning of the 1870's, Gauguin became an enthusiastic Sunday painter and in the end of 1876, was sufficiently experienced in painting so that a landscape of his own was accepted for the Annual Official Hall exposition. However, soon he preferred to expose his works with the impressionists, who were still seen as inveterate rebels. Working hard during his days off, Gauguin adopted an impressionism technique to paint landscapes on the location, using short dabs of pure color to capture atmospheric effects. As his contemporary painters Cézanne and Van Gogh, he considered the impressionism a liberating agent, although he ended up giving origin to a much different style.

Gauguin, doubtless, wanted to abandon the world of business and become a professional painter. What is less clear is if he would have done it without the economical collapse of 1882; at least, his bad financial luck gave him the excuse he needed to start a new career, at the age of 35, as a full time artist.

They were years of difficulties. Mette went to live with her family in Copenhagen, where Gauguin also stayed for a while. After he left, they never lived together again. In 1887, Gauguin had his first artistic tour on the tropics, spending some months in Panama and Martinica.

Forced to go back to France because of Malaria and poverty, he took with himself alive paintings with new colors and free of any previous artistic movement.

However, Gauguin's artistic progress was still more vivid during his visits to Britain in the end of the 1880's, showing himself, at this time, still remote and stimulatingly primitive. There he started to develop his peculiar style, with his traces clearly outlined and strong colors. His style was already defined in 1888, when he went to spend two disastrous months in Arles with Vincent Van Gogh.

In 1891, Gauguin had already established as a leader between the artists and poets of Paris. However, still extremely poor, he made the surprising decision of fixing residence in the far Tahiti. The most celebrated of all his paintings was painted on the island, and the images of an uncorruptedly primitive simplicity had a great impact over the west imagination. Although Gauguin loved the tropical places, life was still very hard and, in 1893, he returned to Paris hoping that his Tahitian paintings became a success and eventually, brought him fame and safety.

After two years of disappointments, Gauguin went back to Tahiti. He was already sick, and his disease got more serious due to a non-diagnosed syphilis condition. Hospitalized very frequently, engaged in manual works and sometimes in the politics and local journalism. His artistic production was irregular; even though, during this period he produced some of his best paintings.

In 1901, Gauguin moved away definitely from civilization that intimidated him, establishing himself in Archipel des Marquises. His pleasure on this new paradise was rapidly spoiled by serious conflicts with local authorities. He was still appealing against a three-month sentence because of slander when his busy life was definitely cut short by a heart attack, on May 8th, 1903.

Some works:

The Yellow Christ (Le Christ jaune) 1889, / Portrait of Madame Gauguin, c. (1880-1881) / Garden in Vaugirard, or the Painter's Family in the Garden in Rue Carcel, (1881) / Still-Life with Fruit and Lemons, c. (1880's) / The Swineherd, Brittany, (1888) / Les Alyscamps, (1888) / Vision After the Sermon (Jacob's fight with the angel), (1888) / Night Café at Arles, (Mme Ginoux), (1888) / Still-Life with Japanese Woodcut, (1889).

