**Director's foreword**

This is an exciting period for the Van Gogh Museum. At the time of publication, the museum is building a new wing for temporary exhibitions and is engaged in a project to renovate its existing building. After eight months, during which the museum will be completely closed to the public (from 1 September 1998), the new wing and the renovation are to be completed and ready for opening in May 1999. The original museum building, designed by Gerrit Rietveld and his partners, requires extensive refurbishment. Numerous improvements will be made to the fabric of the building and the worn-out installations for climate control will be replaced. A whole range of facilities will be up-graded so that the museum can offer a better service to its growing numbers of visitors.

Plans have been laid for housing the collection during the period of closure, and thanks to the co-operation of our neighbours in the Rijksmuseum, visitors to Amsterdam will not be deprived of seeing a great display of works by Van Gogh. A representative selection from the collection will be on show in the South Wing of the Rijksmuseum from mid-September 1998 until early April 1999. In addition, a group of works will be lent to the Rijksmuseum Twenthe in Enschede. We have also taken this opportunity to lend an important exhibition to the United States. Some 70 works will be on show in *Van Gogh's Van Goghs*, shown first at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC and then at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

While a huge amount of time and energy has been invested in the plans for the closure and reopening in 1999, the day to day work of the museum has continued apace. The museum enjoyed an exceptionally good year in 1997, with an attendance of over a million visitors - a tally only exceeded during the year of the Van Gogh retrospective in 1990. The exhibition programmes and their surrounding events were highly successful, and in particular the exhibitions *Alma-Tadema* and *Vienna 1900* attracted wide interest.

The work of the museum's curatorial and academic staff has also continued, amidst the distraction of the building works and the recent publicity surrounding debates over Van Gogh fakes. Some of the fruits of their labours are reflected in this, the third issue of the *Van Gogh Museum Journal*. Exceptionally, this volume covers two years. The basic aim of this *Journal* is to provide an interim catalogue of our acquisitions and to offer a forum for scholarship about Van Gogh and other aspects of our holdings. However, while our own collection provides the starting point, we are keen to stimulate research and scholarship across a wide range of issues in 19th-century art history. We are delighted that several distinguished colleagues from outside the museum have contributed to this *Journal* and we hope that this will continue in subsequent issues.

The *Van Gogh Museum Journal* was established by former director Ronald de Leeuw and it is one of many concrete signs that scholarship flourished during his tenure at the museum. We would like to record our deepest gratitude for his leadership and vision at the Van Gogh Museum and we wish him every success in his new post as Director of the Rijksmuseum. This volume of the Journal is dedicated to Ronald de Leeuw in appreciation of his inspired directorship.

*John Leighton*
Director
fig. 1
Director John Leighton (left) with architects Kisho Kurokawa and Martien van Goor (right), 1998
Review
January 1997 - July 1998

Acquisitions

Alongside its core holdings of Van Gogh and his contemporaries, on permanent loan from the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, the Van Gogh Museum strives to present a broad overview of international art from the period circa 1840-1920. In recent years there have been numerous important purchases and, for example, with the addition of sculpture in the displays, new parameters have been established for the collection. There are still many gaps, however, and while the collection has impressive depth in some areas of the 19th century, such as realism and symbolism, the representation of impressionism and certain aspects of post-impressionism remains unsatisfactory. It is pleasing to report, therefore, that with the purchase of an oil study by Georges Seurat, one very conspicuous gap in the collection has been filled. On more than one occasion Van Gogh expressed a wish to own a study by Seurat and he even thought of exchanging one of his own works with this artist. Unfortunately this plan was never realised, although Theo van Gogh did manage to purchase a very fine drawing, which remains in the collection. The new oil study (purchased with the support of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the Vereniging Rembrandt) is a splendid example of Seurat's early style, from the period when he was working on his famous masterpiece, A Sunday afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte (Art Institute of Chicago). The painting offers a fascinating comparison with Vincent's works from his Paris period and, when shown next to the latter's views of similar motifs, it underlines the importance of Seurat for the development of Van Gogh's art.

Other notable purchases include the fine still life by Théodule Ribot, discussed in the present volume in an article by Gabriel Weisberg (pp. 76-87), while the collection of drawings has been further enhanced with works by Lhermitte, Dupré and Lebourg. An interesting portrayal of Van Gogh by the Scot A.S. Hartrick is a welcome addition to our collection of images of the artist. Hartrick was a fellow student of Van Gogh in the studio of Fernand Cormon in Paris and later published his reminiscences of this period. A spirited oil study by Gerard Bilders has been acquired for the Museum Mesoag. Thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, an important work by Mancini was added to the group of works by this artist in The Hague.

The Bonger collection

In December 1996 it was announced that the Dutch State had purchased the former collection of André Bonger and that these works would be placed in the Van Gogh Museum. The collection consists of over 100 paintings, drawings and prints, mainly by Odilon Redon and Emile Bernard. André Bonger (known as Andries to his friends) lived from 1879 in Paris, where he became friends with Theo van Gogh - Theo would later marry Bonger's sister, Johanna. Through Theo, Bonger came into contact with the Parisian avant-garde and he eventually became an avid collector, purchasing, for example, important works by Van Gogh and Cézanne. His greatest enthusiasm, however, was reserved for his friends Redon and Bernard, and it is particularly
fortunate that so many of these works remained in the hands of Bonger's descendants. The collection that will come to the Van Gogh Museum contains over 50 works by Redon, adding in effect a second core to the museum's holdings. The Bonger collection will be transferred to the Van Gogh Museum in several stages over the following years and plans are already underway for an exhibition of these works, probably in the year 2003.

Loans

Loans play an important part in bolstering the displays of the Van Gogh Museum and we have received vital support from other institutions and from private collectors in our efforts to provide a rich context for Van Gogh's work. The long-term loan of a group of works from the neighbouring Stedelijk Museum has greatly enhanced the presentations with, for example, sculptures by Degas, Renoir and Rodin. Also included in this loan is Van Gogh's La berceuse (presented to the Stedelijk by V.W. van Gogh in 1945), which
is now reunited with the *Sunflowers*, thus evoking Vincent's own ideas on displaying these subjects side by side.

It is clear that the museum will continue to depend on the generosity of lenders, both public and private, if it is to fulfil its ambitions to be a museum of the 19th century. Further cooperation with the Rijksmuseum and the Stedelijk is essential, and discussions with these museums are continuing in an effort to develop a more coherent policy for the presentation of both Dutch and international art of the 19th and 20th centuries in the institutions on the Museumplein.

**Conservation**

The programme of conservation for the collection of Van Gogh drawings and paintings has made good progress. Parallel to the production of scholarly catalogues, all the Van Gogh drawings in the collection are being conserved and, where necessary, restored. A number of drawings by other artists are also being restored in preparation for the exhibition on Theo van Gogh in 1999.

Conservation work was also carried out on several paintings in the collection, among which the most spectacular gain was the restoration by Cornelia Peres of the *Almond blossoms*. The sensitive nuances of blue, light pink and white in this work had been obscured by a layer of discoloured varnish. The removal of this modern, synthetic varnish turned out to be a painstaking task, but the freshness and vigour of this painting are now fully apparent. Work was also carried out on other 19th-century pictures and René Boitelle's skilful restoration of two extremely fragile works by Paul Gauguin (*On the shore of the lake in Martinique* and *Among the mangoes in Martinique*) deserves special mention.

**Academic research**

In 1995 the museum embarked on a project to catalogue in full the entire collection of works by Van Gogh. The second of what will be a series of three volumes on the
drawings was published in the summer of 1997. Compiled by Sjraar van Heugten with the support of other members of the curatorial department, this volume covers the Nuenen period, from 1883 to 1885. Each drawing is illustrated in colour and described in detailed catalogue entries. An introductory essay sets the context for the development of Van Gogh's approach to drawing during his stay.
in Brabant. Work is underway on the first of three volumes on the paintings collection. Written by Louis van Tilborgh and Marije Vellekoop with assistance from Cornelia Peres, this volume is scheduled to appear in the spring of 1999.

Alongside their work on the collection catalogues, the curators have been involved with exhibition work both for the museum itself and for other institutions. The totality of Van Gogh's engravings, first published and shown in the Van Gogh Museum in 1995, were represented in a special exhibition at the Netherlands Institute in Florence, with a catalogue by Sjraar van Heugten and Fieke Pabst. Chief Curator Louis van Tilborgh is the principal author and curator for the forthcoming Van Gogh and Millet exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

The Van Gogh Letters Project began in 1994. In collaboration with the Constantijn Huygens Institute, this will eventually result in a scholarly, annotated edition of all the letters to and from Van Gogh. Work on the transcriptions of all the letters from the Dutch period is now complete and a start has been made on the annotations. While the project is guided by specialists from the two collaborating institutions, there is also a wider Editorial Board, formed by internal and external experts, which met for the second time in June 1998. Meanwhile, members of the Letters Project are making an invaluable contribution to scholarly work throughout the museum, and they have presented their findings to outside scholars in lectures and in articles such as the contribution in the present volume by Leo Jansen.

The museum's academic staff handles a huge volume of enquiries about all aspects of Van Gogh's life and work and deals with numerous requests for expertises. The interest in issues of authenticity surrounding Van Gogh's oeuvre has intensified in recent months, and there has been a steady flow of stories and so-called revelations in the international media. Much of this coverage has been sensationalist, and the attention of the world press has at times served only to distract the staff from their research. However, the museum is keen to encourage constructive and serious debate on these issues. In May 1998 the Van Gogh Museum joined forces with the National Gallery in London to organise a symposium that brought together experts from across the world to discuss various aspects of Van Gogh studies, including authenticity. Held at the National Gallery, this symposium helped to present the public and the press with a clearer picture of some of the most important research projects that are now underway at the Van Gogh Museum and elsewhere. The museum was represented by members of the Letters Project and by curators Louis van Tilborgh and Sjraar van Heugten.

In an introductory talk at the London symposium, the author set out the broad lines of the research programme at the Van Gogh Museum. In the process of cataloguing its own collection and, at the same time, publishing aspects of the Van Gogh archives, the museum is building up a reservoir of experience and information that will be invaluable for the next stage: the revision of the complete catalogue of Van Gogh's oeuvre. It is clear that a vast amount of research, including technical study and archival work, still needs to be done before it makes sense to even begin to tackle such a project. Nevertheless, with its own programmes and working in collaboration with outside scholars, the Van Gogh Museum continues to play a pivotal role in presenting a more distinct picture of Van Gogh and his working methods.
Other activities

Since March 1996 Aukje Vergeest has been engaged in a project to make an inventory and summary catalogue of all the French 19th-century paintings in Dutch public collections. This work has been supported with a subsidy from the Mondriaan Stichting and is supervised by former director Ronald de Leeuw and Louis van Tilborgh. Much of the research is now complete and work on the resulting publication is due to begin next year.

The Museum participates in the Dutch Postgraduate School for Art History, of which it is one of the founding members.

In November 1997 the Van Gogh Museum organised a major international symposium (held at the Rijksmuseum) in honour of former director Ronald de Leeuw. Entitled ‘Presenting the Art of the 19th Century,’ the speakers included Gary Tinterow (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), Neil MacGregor (National Gallery, London), Henri Loyrette (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), John House (Courtauld Institute of Art, London) and (the keynote speaker) Ronald de Leeuw. The first day was devoted to the international scene and the second to the presentation of 19th-century art in Dutch museums. The speakers on the second day included Andreas Blühm, Head of Exhibitions at the Van Gogh Museum, who provided an excellent survey of the different ways in which works by Van Gogh have been presented in exhibitions and displays since the end of the last century.
Library and archive

Since November 1996 the library and archive have been housed in a villa adjoining the museum. This facility is open to the public (on application) on weekdays. In the archive, Fieke Pabst and Monique Hageman provide invaluable support for the museum's scholarly activities and answer numerous enquiries from outside researchers. Our Librarian, Anita Vriend has supervised the new installation of the library and has continued to strengthen the holdings of this important resource for Van Gogh studies.

Museum Mesdag

In October 1996 the Museum Mesdag (managed by the Van Gogh Museum) reopened to the public after a major refurbishment. The initial response was enthusiastic. The careful reconstruction of the original character of the interiors was well received, and the local public enjoyed rediscovering this surprising collection tucked away in a quiet corner of The Hague. Although its superb collections of paintings by Barbizon School artists and the Hague School are known to specialists, the Museum Mesdag has yet to receive the attention that it deserves from the general public. Programmes of visits for schools, as well as public talks, have been organised, often in collaboration with other museums in the so-called Mesdagkwartier, and efforts will continue to raise the national and international profile of this collection.

Exhibitions

While the majority of our foreign visitors come to see the holdings of Van Gogh, it is our programme of changing exhibitions that brings the Dutch public to the museum. Exhibitions now play an essential role in our efforts to attract the local and national public, and there is ample evidence that this policy has been a success. Our surveys show, for example, that the exhibition devoted to Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema attracted a high proportion of Dutch visitors, and while this might be expected of an artist popular in his native land, the same was also true of the exhibition Vienna 1900.

The Alma-Tadema exhibition (29 November 1996-2 March 1997), organised in collaboration with the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, offered a chance to reappraise the work of an artist who was highly celebrated during his own lifetime, but whose work quickly fell out of fashion in this century. The exhibition attracted a record number of visitors for the slow season and the catalogue, with contributions
from a range of specialists in Victorian art (edited by Edwin Becker), became a bestseller in the shop. Numerous activities were developed around the theme of the exhibition, including a special **soirée** with appropriate music and readings, organised in conjunction with the British Council and the Anglo-Dutch Piano Platform.

*Vienna 1900: portraits and interiors* (21 March-15 June 1997) was the first exhibition in the Netherlands of Austrian art from the turn of the century. Some of the finest examples of paintings, graphic art, furniture and the decorative arts from this period were brought together in a show that was produced in collaboration with the major lender, the Österreichische Galerie in Vienna. This exhibition also travelled to the Von der Heydt-Museum in Wuppertal.

The summer exhibition of 1997 was devoted to Van Gogh's drawings from Brabant, to coincide with the publication of Sjraar van Heugten's catalogue of this part of the collection (see above). This was followed by *Auguste Préault, 1809-1879: romanticism in bronze* (17 October 1997-11 January 1998), organised in collaboration with the Musée d'Orsay, Paris and the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Blois. As part of our series on lesser known 19th-century artists this show highlighted the career of one of the most important sculptors of the romantic era. It included masterpieces such as *Le silence* (1842) and *Ophélia* (c. 1870), as well as a number of portrait medallions of fellow artists, actors and poets.

The Van Gogh Museum houses more than 400 Japanese prints from the collection assembled by Vincent and Theo van Gogh. Some 46 of these prints are by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), an artist best known for his depictions of Japanese heroes and battles. From 30 January-
5 April 1998 the Museum showed a major retrospective of Kuniyoshi's work, with high-quality prints from collections across the world. Besides Kuniyoshi's prints and illustrated books, the show contained a selection of the artist's drawings and paintings. The exhibition was organised with the Society for Japanese Arts, who also published the catalogue by Robert Schaap. Following its showing in Amsterdam this exhibition was presented at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

With great reluctance and sadness the museum was forced to abandon its plans to host a major exhibition devoted to British symbolism. The show, entitled *The age of Rosetti, Burne-Jones and Watts: symbolism in Britain 1860-1910*, opened at the Tate Gallery in London before moving to the Haus der Kunst in Munich. The following venue should have been Amsterdam, but this was cancelled when it became apparent that the transport of the art works would coincide with major construction work in the Rietveld building. The staff had already devoted much time and energy to this project, and it is to be hoped that an exhibition on this subject may take place at the Van Gogh Museum in the future.

The honour of being the last exhibition in the Rietveld building before the closure thus fell to a more modest yet still highly attractive undertaking. From 8 April there was a display of 19th-century photographs from the Prentenkabinet of Leiden University. With some 80,000 items, this print room houses one of the most important photographic collections in the Netherlands, yet until recently it faced an uncertain future. The selection, made by students from university working under the supervision of Ingeborg Leijerzapf, included stunning works by well-known practitioners such as Julia Margaret Cameron and George Hendrik Breitner, as well as a number of intriguing images by some of the now-anonymous pioneers of the art of photography.

**Public service and education**

In addition to the lectures, tours and other activities which it offers in connection with special exhibitions, the museum also offers interpretative material on the permanent collection. In 1997 explanatory texts were added to the labels for all the paintings on display (except those by Van Gogh). Explanatory material on the Van Gogh collection is provided by, for example, the popular audio-tour under the auspices of Accoustiguide. After the closure of the auditorium in the autumn of 1997 for building work, lunch-time

![fig. 4](image)

John Leighton and First Lady Hilary Clinton in front of Van Gogh's *Bedroom in Arles*, 27 May 1997 (official White House photograph)
lectures continued to be held in front of the pictures, attracting a loyal audience every Wednesday.

The preparations for the closure of the museum and the steadily encroaching building works has meant that many activities have had to be scaled down in 1998. However, at the time of writing, ambitious plans are being laid for a new approach to education in the Van Gogh Museum when it reopens in May 1999.

**Friends of the Van Gogh Museum**

The Museum enjoys the support of a small but active Friends Organisation. Among their many initiatives was the introduction of an information desk in the museum, manned by a group of volunteers who were willing to give up their free time to offer an important service to our visitors. The desk has become so successful that it has been decided to make it an integral part of the museum's operations. As a result, following the reopening next year, the desk will be run by paid employees. We pay tribute here to the work of our loyal volunteers and record our gratitude for their important contribution in establishing this service.

**Attendance figures**

In 1997 the Van Gogh Museum was attended by 1,018,684 visitors. The attendance figure for the Museum Mesdag in 1997 was 16,454.

*John Leighton*

*Director*

[Van Gogh Studies]

[De dbnl is niet gemachtigd deze tekst hier weer te geven.]
fig. 1
Van Gogh in Utrecht: the collection of Gerlach Ribbius Peletier (1856-1930)

Louis van Tilborgh and Marije Vellekoop

In the first ten years following his death Van Gogh did not enjoy a particularly high reputation in the Netherlands. The art market was experiencing great difficulties, and only a few collectors believed in the artist unreservedly. His works had not yet proved their value and were sold only sporadically. This did not change until the beginning of the 20th century, when modest collectors among the well-to-do took an interest in his art. Interestingly they showed a preference for his Dutch work. Until the turn of the century the emphasis in exhibitions had been on Van Gogh's French paintings and drawings, but soon after 1900 works from his time in Holland began to receive more and more attention, as many artworks from this period were recently (re)discovered. The previous 'reversed order' in exhibiting Van Gogh's work was also remarked on in a review in *Onze Kunst*: 'By chance the world was first presented with the pictures from the second, more impassioned period. [...] But this phase of superhuman struggle was not seen in the correct light as long as his earlier Dutch work remained unknown. It is now emerging piece by piece: first his drawings and watercolours, in which there is so much piercing emotion and telling characterisation, and finally his oil paintings, which include examples - compared with what he did later - of what one could almost call paradoxical capability.'

One of the new collectors of the early 20th century was Gerlach Ribbius Peletier (1856-1930) (fig. 1), the son of Gerlach Ribbius Peletier Sr (1818-1901) who came from Zaltbommel, where his father and Lion Philips (1794-1866) had founded a business dealing in coffee, tea and tobacco. In 1844 Ribbius Peletier Sr started a similar enterprise in Utrecht, the later Koninklijke Sigarenfabriek G. Ribbius Peletier. This made him a fortune and by the end of his life he was even a multimillionaire.

To prepare him for his future role as successor to his father, Ribbius Peletier Jr, the first child and only son, was sent to the Handelsschule in Leipzig at the age of 16. In 1885 Ribbius Peletier Sr took his son into the management of the cigar factory. He proved not to be cut out for business, however, and in 1891 his father bought him the Linschoten estate, near Woerden. There, by now a married man with three

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children, Ribbius Peletier Jr lived the life of a landed gentleman in the British style.\(^3\)

In the absence of a successor, the tobacco business was sold in 1896. When Ribbius Peletier Sr died five years later, his son received a substantial legacy. Relieved of the burden of a somewhat tyrannical father, he immediately set about enjoying his new-found freedom. In 1901 he had a house built for his family on the Maliebaan in Utrecht and began seriously building up an art collection (figs. 2-4).\(^4\)

\(^3\) Ribbius Peletier had married Adriana Louisa Wijbelingh in 1886; their first child was born a year later. The family first lived on the Moreelsepark and later on the Maliesingel in Utrecht.

\(^4\) In 1890 Ribbius Peletier made what are believed to have been his first acquisitions, namely two works by the ‘minor master’ Arthur Briët; see Lindschoten, Huis te Linschoten, Ribbius Peletier family archive (1813-1993), no. 803 (henceforth RP archive).
The Ribbius Peletier family at the house at Maliebaan 15, Utrecht, 1903-04. From left to right: Gerlach, Elisabeth, Adriana, Adriana Louisa Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh with Louise on her lap, Davina, and Gerlach Ribbius Peletier. On the left Van Gogh's *Head of a woman* (no. 3) is partly visible. Linschoten, Verzameling Stichting Landgoed Linschoten

**Bremmer's influence**

Ribbius Peletier's first purchase in the field of modern art was *Woman digging* by Vincent van Gogh (no. 1), which he bought in late 1902. He acquired a taste for this artist and also had a particular liking for the work of Floris Verster (1861-1927) (fig. 5) and Jan van Goyen (1596-1656). Indeed, his collection was ‘best known for its fine Van Goyens, Versters and above all Van Goghs.’ With eight paintings, Van Goyen was the best represented among the Old Masters, while Van Gogh with ten works and Verster with seven formed the core of his collection of contemporary art, which eventually embraced 110 pieces. These included, among others, work by lesser-known artists such as Van Daalhoff (1867-1953), Degouve de Nuncques (1867-1935), Hettinga Tromp (1872-1962), Zandleven (1868-1923) and Van Rijsselbergh (1862-1926). In addition to paintings and works on paper, Ribbius Peletier collected numerous small sculptures by contemporary artists such as Altorf (1876-1955), Mendes da Costa (1863-1939), Minne (1866-1941), Raedecker (1885-1956) and Zijl (1866-1947).

This characteristic but at first rather odd-seeming combination of disparate masters reflects the fact that Ribbius Peletier's collection was formed under the influence of

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5 RP archive, ‘Lijst Inkoop van Schilderijen, Porcelein & Kunstvoorwerpen,’ no. 825. This inventory was drawn up after April 1921.

6 See The Hague, Gemeente Archief, Bremmer archive, Aleida Bremmer-Beekhuis, ‘Dienaar der kunst’ (manuscript), 1937-41, p. 325: ‘Steeds kwamen er meer liefhebbers die gaarne onder zijne leiding hunne collectie verrijkt. Onder die van den eersten tijd, neemt die van den Heer G. Ribbius Peletier te Utrecht een eerste plaats in, vooral om de fijne van Goyens, Versters en bovenal van Goghs’ (‘More and more art lovers came who wanted to add to their collections under his guidance. Among the earliest, the collection of Mr G. Ribbius Peletier of Utrecht takes pride of place, chiefly because of its fine Van Goyens, Versters and above all Van Goghs’).

7 The collection of Old Masters will not be considered further here.

8 Van Daalhoff was represented by seven works, Degouve de Nuncques by three, Hettinga Tromp by four, Zandleven by six, Van Rijsselbergh by two, Altorf by nine, Minne and Raedecker by two, and Mendes da Costa and Zijl by thirteen.
the painter and art teacher H.P. Bremmer (1871-1956), who, from 1893, gave lessons in art to interested members of the wealthy classes.\footnote{Ribbius Peletier}

took instruction from Bremmer from 1896 on, later even at his new house on the Maliebaan, as Davina van Wely, his daughter, tells us. In a letter to Bremmer's children following his death she recalled these gatherings: ‘Our thoughts turned involuntarily to our childhood in Utrecht, when your father regularly gave lessons at Maliebaan 15 and then stayed to drink coffee. The discussions with him were always interesting and instructive.’\footnote{The Hague, Gemeente Archief, Bremmer archive, letter from D. van Wely-Ribbius Peletier to Bremmer's family, 20 February 1956 (on the occasion of his death): ‘Onze gedachten gingen onwillekeurig naar onze jeugd in Utrecht, toen Uw Vader geregeld in de Maliebaan 15 les gaf en daarna bleef koffiedrinken. De gesprekken met hem waren steeds interressant en leerrijk.’}

In both Bremmer's lessons and the journals he published Van Gogh played a prominent role. In \textit{Moderne}
The Ribbius Peletier family at the house at Maliebaan 15, Utrecht, 1910. From left to right: Adriana, Louise, Adriana Louisa Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Davina, Gerlach Ribbius Peletier, Gerlach (standing), Elisabeth. Linschoten, Verzameling Stichting Landgoed Linschoten

*Kunstwerken,* for example - the journal Bremmer published between 1903 and 1910 - he was the artist most frequently discussed. Four issues were devoted exclusively to him. In his choice of Van Gogh's paintings and drawings, the art educator revealed a preference for the artist's Dutch work. It seems that Bremmer saw parallels between himself and the older artist, both in his development from naturalism via neo-impressionism to a personal idealism, and in the sense of having had a vocation for art. The interest in Van Gogh's work among those taking Bremmer's course can thus be attributed to the influence of this 'apostle of art,' who also felt no scruples about recommending other artists he valued to his wealthy pupils.

With his early Van Gogh acquisitions, Ribbius Peletier set the tone for Bremmer's students in Utrecht. He bought his first work at the end of 1902, while A.C. Kapteijn-van Heijst, the wife of the mathematics professor W. Kapteijn, only acquired Van Gogh's *Still life with ginger jar and apples* (F 104 JH 923) in 1904, and C.E.A. Mees-Moll, the wife of an alderman, bought the *Old tower at Nuenen* of 1885 (F 184 JH 458) probably around the same time. Another student, the surgeon and lecturer at the Universiteit van Utrecht, J.E. van der Meulen, purchased two works by Van Gogh: *Still life with brass coffee pot* of 1885 (F 202 JH 738) and the drawing *People under an umbrella* (F 990 JH 172) from The Hague-period, both of inferior quality.

Ribbius Peletier was not, however, the first in Bremmer's Utrecht circle with a taste for Van Gogh. That honour went to the young schoolmistress W. Haakma van Roijen, who in 1898 - at the age of 24 - had bought Van Gogh's *Field with poppies*

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12 Ibid., p. 48.
13 Mrs Mees-Moll must have already owned the painting in 1905, as she is mentioned as a potential lender to the exhibition that was to take place at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in that year. See Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter from H.P. Bremmer to Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, undated, letter b 1969 V/1962.
14 Next to that of Ribbius Peletier the largest collection of Van Goghs was that of W.P. Ingenegeren (1853-1930). Director of the ‘Utrecht’ insurance company, he is not known to have been one of Bremmer's pupils. He managed to acquire four paintings from the Dutch period: F 203a JH , F 212a JH 929, F 191 JH 762 and F 310a JH 1273. He bought the last two directly from Johanna van Gogh-Bonger.
The purchase was made following an exhibition of works from Johann van Gogh-Bonger's collection at Arts & Crafts in The Hague, where the painting was on display. ‘She was the only one without money among a group of rich people, most of whom shook their heads at such extravagance,’ Bremmer's wife was to write later. The critic Albert Plasschaert, who had written the introduction to the catalogue, encouraged Bremmer to assist in the young student's

15 Van Gogh's work had occasionally been collected even earlier in Utrecht, but outside Bremmer's circle. From 1892 A.E. van Eelde-van Rappard owned an otherwise unidentified *Flowering orchard* from the collection of Johann van Gogh-Bonger, as appears from the latter's cash book (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation). E.M. van Hoogstraten-van Hoytema, who lived next to the Van Eelde family on the Catherijnesingel, also owned an otherwise unspecified work. Both women were friends of the writer and psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden, who may have recommended these purchases in order to give a helping hand to Johanna, another friend; see Jan Fontijn, *Tweespalt: Het leven van Frederik van Eeden tot 1901*, Amsterdam 1990, pp. 296-318, 365, 373.

16 Included in the catalogue, *Exhibition of the paintings: Vincent van Gogh* as no. 26: *Flowers.*

17 Bremmer-Beekhuis, op. cit. (note 6), p. 162-63: ‘Zij was de eenige ongefortuineerde onder een groep rijke mensen welke meerendeels het hoofd schudden over zoo'n buitensporigheid.’
acquisition: ‘Give her that poppy field: first because it is a beautiful thing; second because it's good if they stay in Holland, or rather his country, where he is perhaps the least honoured; 3rd because it is a source of pride to the girl - and such an attractive thing - to buy a Van Gogh, and one can boast about it [...] to everyone.’

Kunstzalen Oldenzeel

While the acquisition of a work by Van Gogh in the 1890s was not in the least considered bon ton in wealthy circles, the situation changed in the early years of this century. This was when for the first time Van Gogh's work began to be regarded as good enough to be bought by museums. In 1902 the collector Ernst Osthaus (1874-1921) purchased Van Gogh's *The reaper* (1889) (f 619 JH 1792) for his new museum in Hagen, and in April 1903 the Museum Boymans in Rotterdam put its newly acquired *Avenue of poplars* (1885) (f 45 JH 959) on display.

Ribbius Peletier had bought his first work five months earlier: in December 1902 he acquired Van Gogh's *Woman digging* for f 200 from his teacher Bremmer (no. 1). The latter was himself very attached to the painting, as indicated by his remark that he would always be prepared to buy it back for the same price. Soon afterwards, in a flush of enthusiasm following his first purchase, Ribbius Peletier was tempted by two further Van Gogh paintings, *Head of a woman* and *Seascape at Scheveningen* (nos. 2 and 3). He had seen them at the Kunstzalen Oldenzeel in Rotterdam,

18 The Hague, Gemeente Archief, Bremmer archive, letter from Albert Plasschaert to Bremmer, 1898: ‘Geef ze dat klaproze-veld: 1e Omdat ‘t schoon ding is; 2e omdat ‘t goed is dat ze in Holland blijven, of liever, in z'n land waar i misschien minst geerfd is; 3e omdat het roem is voor ‘n meisie - en haast een bekoorlijkheid: een Van Gogh te koopen en je roept toch graag op menschen rond je, iedereen.’
20 ‘Lijst Inkoop,’ cit. (note 5).
21 This remark is to be found in Ribbius Peletier's cash book for 1898-1905 (RP archive, no. 494).
where in January 1903 an exhibition of unknown Dutch work by the master had been held. Ribbius Peletier soon agreed a price for the portrait with Mrs Oldenzeel, buying it immediately for f 500. However, the price she asked for the second work, which had been widely praised in the press, seemed to be beyond all reason: ‘Truly I dare not bid with an asking price of f 5000 for the sea by Van Gogh,’ he wrote in a letter of 29 January 1903. ‘In my view the price is so high and so out of all proportion to the price of f 750 for the flowers and the bird's nests that the asking price ought surely to be based on that level. If that should be decided on, I will give the matter further consideration and possibly make you an offer. The absence of a signature on the piece greatly reduces the market value, especially for the future, as you would doubtless concede.’

Oldenzeel lowered the price to f 3500, whereupon Ribbius Peletier offered 2500, on condition that a certificate of authenticity be provided. The dealer agreed without further negotiation, for this was still a record price. Oldenzeel's prices were generally much higher than those asked by Johanna Van Gogh-Bonger. For example, in April 1903, the latter sold the much finer and also larger *Avenue of poplars* (F 45 JH 959) to the Museum Boymans for only f 750, and in 1905 W.P. Ingenegeren acquired from her *Landscape with setting sun* (F 191 JH 762) for just f 350.

On receiving the works, Ribbius Peletier complained about their condition, from which we can conclude that he had either not examined them carefully himself or had relied on the judgement of a third party. If the latter were the case, this would no doubt have been Bremmer. ‘What a pity that the wood to which the paintings are attached is apparently so young. The pieces are warping badly and we will have to find a remedy for dealing with this problem.’ From the supports used for other Van Gogh paintings sold by Oldenzeel in this period, we can infer that gluing the works

22 This exhibition consisted of works Van Gogh had left with his mother in Nuenen in 1885. When she moved to Breda a year later, she gave several chests with Vincent's work for safekeeping to Mr Schrauwen, a carpenter from Breda. 15 years later Schrauwen sold the drawings and paintings to a dealer in second-hand goods, J.C. Couvreur. He in turn sold them to C. Mouwen and W. van Bakel of Breda, who in 1903 put their collection up for sale through Kunstzalen Oldenzeel. The first exhibition took place from 4 January-5 February.

23 ‘Lijst Inkoop,’ cit. (note 5).

24 RP archive, Brievenboek (1901-03), letter 348, no. 411: ‘Die prijs is m.i. zoo hoog en zoo buiten alle verhouding met een prijs van f 750 voor de bloemen en de vogelnesten dat die vraagprijs gerust op die leest zoudt kunnen worden gesteld. Wanneer men daar toe zouden kunnen besluiten, wil ik over de zaak nader denken en U dan eventueel een bod doen. Het ontbreken van eene handteekening op het stuk doet veel afbreuk voor [?] de *handelswaarde* vooral voor later, zooals U zelf wel zult willen toegeven.’

25 RP archive, Brievenboek (1901-03), letter 355, c. 4 February 1903, no. 411.

26 See Johanna van Gogh-Bonger's cash book, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation. Johanna van Gogh-Bonger did not ask prices as high as Oldenzeel's until 1908-09 and then only for French works, which generally fetched more. It was only in 1924 that she sold a Nuenen painting for f 2500. This was F 140 JH 745, which was sold to the Leicester Gallery in London.

27 RP archive, Brievenboek (1901-03), letter 367, 14 February 1903, no. 411: ‘Jammer dat het hout waarop de schilderstukken bevestigd zijn, oogenschijnlijk erg versch is. De stukken trekken zeer krom en 't zal wenselijk zijn dit gebrek afdoende te verbeteren.’
to them was normal practice. The original support of *Seascape at Scheveningen* was not canvas but paper.\(^{28}\)

In 1904 Ribbius Peletier again bought works from Oldenzeel. The Rotterdam gallery would have liked to have sold him their entire stock of works by Van Gogh, as a letter of 3 July 1904 indicates.\(^{29}\) A great deal had remained unsold from exhibitions in 1903 and an auction in May 1904,\(^{30}\) and it had apparently been decided to take a chance on this genuine admirer of the artist who, in addition, did not balk at high prices, as the sale of the *Seascape* had already shown. However, Ribbius Peletier turned out to be less eager and more critical than the dealer had hoped. ‘Having carefully considered everything, I have decided *not* to take up the offer of the entire collection of Vincent van Gogh,’ he informed Oldenzeel.\(^{31}\) He was interested in only five paintings and, without waiting to know the asking price, made an offer of f3000 for ‘Autumn // Peat barge // Shepherd // Small watermill or waterwheel // Winter landscape with 4 figures carrying

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\(^{28}\) We do not know exactly when the warping problem was cured, but it must have been some time in the 1930s or 40s. When the panel was removed, the paper probably also came off with it, after which the paint layer was transferred to canvas. The restoration was carried out by A.M. de Wild, whose name is stamped on the stretcher. De Wild advised the Stedelijk Museum on restorations from 1933, so the restoration may have been carried out soon after 1947, the year the *Seascape* arrived in the museum. See Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Van Gogh Museum archive, K. Beltinger, unpublished reports on the painting from the Stichting Kollektief Restauratie Atelier, Amsterdam, 1991 and 1992.

\(^{29}\) RP archive, Brievenboek (1903-05), letter 173, no. 412.

\(^{30}\) In May 1904 an attempt had been made to sell the Mouwen and Van Bakel collection by auction at Frederik Muller & Cie in Amsterdam. As at the exhibitions, most of the work remained unsold.

\(^{31}\) Letter 173, cit. (note 29): ‘Nadat ik alles nog eens rijkelijk heb overwogen kom ik tot het besluit om *niet* te reflecteren op de geheele verzameling van Vincent van Gogh.’
faggots.' Oldenzeel did not take him seriously, but Ribbius Peletier persisted. ‘I knew that 3500 was asked for the four paintings without the winter landscape,’ he wrote. ‘I find that price far too high and believe that 3000 paid in cash for the five paintings is a very reasonable offer on my part.’ To increase the pressure, a day later he sent a valuation of the works by Bremmer, which has not survived. In the end a price of f 3500 was agreed, and a new painting, *Mending the nets*, took the place of the *Peat barge* on the list. At the end of July 1904 he became the proud owner of *Evening twilight in autumn* (no. 4), *Mending the nets* (no. 5), *Shepherd with flock beneath a stormy sky* (no. 6), *Gennep watermill* (no. 7) and *Woodgatherers in the snow* (no. 8).

These purchases brought the number of Van Gogh paintings in Ribbius Peletier's collection to eight. The selection was rather one-sided, as all the works were from the artist's Dutch period. Whether this was a deliberate aesthetic choice (perhaps influenced by Bremmer), inspired by thrift, or governed by what was on the market at the time is difficult to judge. In due course, however, he wanted to have a 'French Vincent,' too, as he mentioned to Bremmer. In June 1911 the latter drew his attention to the small but charming *View of the Alpilles* (no. 9), which the Amsterdam dealer C.M. van Gogh had acquired. ‘I see here a small painting by Vincent van Gogh, 26 × 32, from his French period. It seems to me a gem and costs f 1800. For this quality the price is certainly not too high. It shows mountainous country with a few flowering trees and blue mountains in the background. The light is very beautiful and it is a fully finished work by Vincent. [...] If I had the money, I would buy it for myself on the spot. If you're considering it, don't wait too long.’

Ribbius Peletier did not hesitate, and that same month he bought the French landscape for the price asked. It is a work from Van Gogh's stay at Saint-Rémy, but

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32 Ibid.:'Herfst // Turfschuit // Schaapsherder // Kleine watermolens van Waterrad // Winterlandschap met 4 takkenbosdragers.’
33 RP archive, Brievenboek (1903-05), letter 182, 8 July 1904, no. 412: ‘Ik vind de prijs veel te hoog en meen met f 3000 voor de 5 schilderijen bij contante betaling een zeer aannemelijk bod te doen.’
34 This valuation is mentioned in the accompanying note from Ribbius Peletier to Oldenzeel: RP archive, Brievenboek (1903-05), letter 194, 9 July 1904, no. 412. That Bremmer was involved in the purchase is apparent from both the taxation and a note from Ribbius Peletier to Bremmer of 12 July 1904 (letter 205), in which he informed the latter of the rejection of his offer of f 3000. Interestingly, Ribbius Peletier noted on his inventory list (cit. [note 5]) that he had bought the five paintings from Bremmer. This is contradicted by his price negotiations with Oldenzeel in July and by the receipt he received from Kunstzalen Oldenzeel on 19 July (RP archive, no. 807).
35 This *Peat barge* (F 21 JH 415) was sold - probably later that year - to J. van Hoey Smith, Rotterdam; since 1997 it has been in the Drents Museum at Assen.
36 RP archive, letter from H.P. Bremmer to G. Ribbius Peletier, written on the letterhead of the dealer C.M. van Gogh, 21 June 1911, no. 811.
37 Ibid. At the bottom of this letter, J.H. de Bois, the manager of the gallery's branch in The Hague, added a few lines in which he offered to send the painting over 'for inspection' for a day. It is not known whether this offer was accepted: ‘Ik zie hier een klein schilderijtje van Vincent van Gogh 26 × 32 uit diens Franschen tijd. Het is volgens mij een juweel van een dingetje en kost f 1800. Voor de kwaliteit is de prijs zeker niet te groot. Het is een begaaghachtig terrein met een paar bloeiende boomjes er in, blauwe bergen op den achtergrond. Het licht is er heel mooi in en het is een geheel voltoooid werk van Vincent. [...] Wanneer ik het geld had, dan kocht ik het direct voor mij zelf. Als je er over denkt, moet je niet al te lang wachten.’
he probably bought it as a work from the Arles period, as Bremmer refers to the painting as *Mountain landscape in Arles* in an inventory of 1918. When Ribbius Peletier bought his last Van Gogh, also a work from Saint-Rémy, he probably thought he was adding a piece from a new period in the oeuvre to his collection. He acquired this second ‘French Vincent,’ *Huts; reminiscence of the north* of 1890 (no. 10), eight years after acquiring the first. This time he did not use a dealer, but bought for himself at auction, possibly tipped off by Bremmer. He purchased the painting in February 1919 for *f* 8690 at the auction of the Sternheim collection at Frederik Muller in Amsterdam.38

The ten paintings by Van Gogh in Ribbius Peletier’s collection were all hung in the house on the Maliebaan in Utrecht.39 No less than half were placed - together with work by Verster, Bosboom, Degouve de Nuncques, Van Daalhoff, Hettinga Tromp, Tholen, Gabriël and Hart Nibrig - in the salon: *Seascape at Scheveningen* (no. 3), *Mending the nets* (no. 5), *Evening twilight in autumn* (no. 4), *View of the Alpilles* (no. 9) and *Huts; reminiscence of the north* (no. 10). Two Van Goghs, the *Gennep watermill* (no. 7) and *Head of a woman* (no. 2) could be found in the living room, where they were in the distinguished company of six paintings by Jan van Goyen (fig. 6).40 The two large pieces, *Shepherd with flock beneath a stormy sky* (no. 6) and *Woodgatherers*

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38 ‘Lijst Inkoop,’ cit. (note 5).
39 RP archive, inventory drawn up after the death of Mrs A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh in 1939, no. 1015. This lists the works hanging in each room.
40 This room also contained work by Roelofs, Zandleven, Van Daalhoff, Van der Nat, H.J. Weissenbruch and Bilders van Bosse.
*in the snow* (no. 8), served a decorative function: the former was hung in the office and the second in the corridor outside. Ribbius Peletier's special attachment to his first purchase is demonstrated by the fact that this painting, *Woman digging* (no. 1), was accorded the honour of being the only work of art to hang in his study.

**Not for sale**

The Van Goghs in Ribbius Peletier's collection soon acquired a certain reputation. The painter Floris Verster, who was also represented with several works, wrote to Ribbius Peletier on 24 July 1904: ‘The next time I'm in Utrecht I hope to call on you; I would so like to see that wonderful sea by Van Gogh that hung at Oldenzeel in Rotterdam again. It's the finest Van Gogh I know.’ Others wanted to do more than just admire. In 1905 one J.W.A.R. Schuurbeke Baeye of The Hague enquired on behalf of friends abroad whether the collection of Van Gogh paintings was ‘on the market,’ but Ribbius Peletier did not wish to take up this offer. ‘Have only a few paintings by VvG, which I do not wish to sell. Referred to H.P. Bremmer,’ says his note on the matter. In September 1910 the German dealer Marcel Goldschmidt of Frankfurt showed interest in the - now much more highly priced - works by Van Gogh, but again Ribbius Peletier did not react. This interest was not surprising: the collector had allowed several of his paintings to be included in *Vincent Van Gogh. 40 photocollographies d’après ses tableaux et dessins*, published in 1904 or 1905, and had loaned them to exhibitions on several occasions. Two works from his collection

![Image](image_url)

**fig. 6**

Elsie Spronck, *The living room of the Ribbius Peletier family, Maliebaan 15, Utrecht*, 1932, Linschoten, Verzameling Stichting Landgoed Linschoten. Two works by Van Gogh (nos. 2 and 7) can be seen in this painting, as well as works by Van Goyen, Roelofs, Zandleven, Zijl and others.

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41 RP archive, postcard from F. Verster to G. Ribbius Peletier, no. 811: ‘Wanneer ik eens te Utrecht kom, hoop ik eens bij U aan te komen; ik zou n.l. nog zoø gaarne die prachtige zee van v. Gogh eens terugzien die in Rotterdam bij Oldenzeel gehangen heeft. ‘t Is voor mij de mooiste v.G. die ik ken.’

42 RP archive, letter dated 16 February 1905, no. 812.


(nos. 3 and 8) were seen, for example, at the first large Van Gogh retrospective at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.\(^4^5\)

The collection was kept together until the late 1930s. Ribbius Peletier died in 1930, his wife, Adriana Louisa Wijbelingh (1863-1939), nine years later. The collection was then divided between the five children, each of whom was free to express a preference. A few works were sold, but none by Van Gogh.\(^4^6\) Gerlach (1887-1969), the eldest and the

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\(^{45}\) In November 1904, no. 2 was on view at an exhibition at the Kunztalen Oldenzeel. No less than four works (nos. 3, 6, 8 and 9) were shown in 1913 at an exhibition organised by Bremmer and held at the Kröller-Müller family's house at Lange Voorhout 1 in The Hague. Ribbius Peletier's largest exhibition loan - seven works - was to a show his daughter Elisabeth helped to organise; see note 49. The illustrated album that appeared in 1905 included five of the eight works Ribbius Peletier then owned: nos. 4-8.

\(^{46}\) In 1940 and 1944 a total of 25 works, among them pieces by Altorf, Zandleven, Roelofs, Verster and Van Daalhoff, were sold through various auctioneers.
only son, took nothing for himself, generously leaving his sisters ample choice." Davina (1889-1967) declared *Huts; reminiscence of the north* (no. 10) her 'sentimental choice.' The 'preferred choice' of Elisabeth (1891-1989) was the Scheveningen seascape (no. 3), while Adriana (1894-1961) chose *Woodgatherers in the snow* (no. 8). Louise (1903-1973) expressed a special liking for a small sculpture by Mendes da Costa and for Van Gogh's *Head of a woman* (no. 2).

These wishes were taken into account when the works were allocated; after all, there were no conflicting interests. In addition to the *Huts* from Saint-Rémy, Davina received *Shepherd with flock beneath a stormy sky* (no. 6). Gerlach inherited the *Woman digging* (no. 1), which had hung in his father's study. Elisabeth, who in 1926 had worked on an exhibition about Van Gogh at the Stedelijk Museum, organised by the socialist Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale, received the most works. As well as her preferred choice, *Seascape at Scheveningen* (no. 3), she inherited *View of the Alpilles* (no. 9) and the *Gennep watermill* (no. 7). Adriana received the *Evening twilight in autumn* as well as the *Wood-gatherers* (nos. 4 and 8), while Louise was given *Mending the nets* and the *Head of a woman* (nos. 5 and 2).

Ribbius Peletier's collection was thus dispersed. However, of his ten Van Gogh paintings, four have ended up in Dutch museums. In 1963 the heirs of Adriana Ubbens-Ribbius Peletier gave *Evening twilight in autumn* to the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, and in the 1970s Elisabeth Ribbius Peletier decided to bequeath the works she owned to the state. A *grand dame* of the women's movement and an ardent social-democrat, she had in mind that they should be shown at the recently founded but not yet open Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, and thus allowed V.W. van Gogh, nephew of the artist and chairman of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, to make his choice.

He initially chose 'the seascape, because we have no painting from that early period,' but quickly realised that the Foundation's collection did include a study for the view of the Alpilles, and so he informed Mrs Ribbius Peletier: 'If you were to ask me now which of your three paintings I would like to see later in our museum, I would change what I told you on Saturday. I now think the painting from Saint-Rémy more important for our collection than the "Seascape" because it would hang together with the drawing on one panel. [...] What I said about the "Seascape" of course remains the case, namely that it forms a link that is missing from the collection.' When Elisabeth Ribbius Peletier died in 1989, at the age of 98, both
works proved to have been left to the Van Gogh Museum, while the Watermill was bequeathed to the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{54} Since May 1990 this painting has been on long-term loan to the Noordbrabants Museum in Den Bosch.
Catalogue

The following abbreviations are used for the values:

1905 Insurance values for exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
1907 Valuation list by H.P. Bremmer, 2 January 1907
1918 List of paintings with insurance values, 1 February 1918
1919 Undated list of modern paintings. Since all the Van Gogh paintings are included, the list must date from after 1919.
1940 Valuation list of modern paintings, compiled by d'Audretsch for the division of the estate.

1 Woman digging

Nuenen, July-August 1885
Oil on canvas on panel, 41.5 × 32 cm
F 95 JH 827

1902 H.P. Bremmer, The Hague
1902-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Bremmer in December for f200
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1939-69 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht
1969-75 heirs of G. Ribbius Peletier
1975 Mak van Waay (Amsterdam), 15 April, lot 43, for f64,000
1980 Sotheby's (London), 1 July, lot 40, for £55,000
1980 in December with a dealer, Heidelberg
c. 1980-81 private collection, Germany
1981 Sotheby's (London), 2 December, lot 27 (withdrawn)
1990 Maui Gallery, Hawaii; present location unknown

Values:
1902 f200; 1907 f350; 1918 f2500; 1919 f1800; 1940 f1800
2 Head of a woman

Nuenen, December 1884-May 1885
Oil on canvas on panel, 40.5 × 30.5 cm
F 144 JH 561

1885-86 A.C. van Gogh-Car bentus, Nuenen/Breda
1886-1902 Schrauwen, Breda
1902 J.C. Couvreur, Breda
1902-03 W. van Bakel and C. Mouwen, Breda
1903 Oldenzeel gallery, Rotterdam, exhibition in January/February, no. 4
1903-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Oldenzeel in February for f 500
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1939-c. 1959 L.J. Schokking-Ribbius Peletier, Doorn
c. 1959 E.J. Van Wisselingh & Co., Amsterdam
before 1960-62 private collection, Canada; present location unknown

Values:
1905 $500; 1907 $500; 1918 $1500; 1919 $1500; 1940 $1500

3 Seascape at Scheveningen
The Hague, August 1882
Oil on canvas, 34.5 × 51 cm
F 4 JH 187

1885-86 A.C. van Gogh-Carbentus, Nuenen/Breda
1886-1902 Schrauwen, Breda
1902 J.C. Couvreur, Breda
1902-03 W. van Bakel and C. Mouwen, Breda
1903 Oldenzeel gallery, Rotterdam, exhibition in January-February, no. 18
1903-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Oldenzeel for ƒ2500 in February
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1939-89 A.E. Ribbius Peletier, Amsterdam/Scheveningen
(1949-90 on loan to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)
1990 bequeathed to the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Values:
1903 ƒ2500; 1905 ƒ4000; 1907 ƒ3000; 1918 ƒ4000; 1919 ƒ3000; 1940 ƒ3000
4 Evening twilight in autumn

Nuenen, October-November 1885
Oil on canvas, 51 × 93 cm
F 121 JH 956

1885-86 A.C. van Gogh-Car bentus, Nuenen/Breda
1886-1902 Schrauwen, Breda
1902 J.C. Couvreur, Breda
1902-03 W. van Bakel and C. Mouwen, Breda
1903 Oldenzeel gallery, Rotterdam, exhibition in November, no. 33?
1904 Fred. Muller (Amsterdam), 3 May, lot 14 (asking price f 575, withdrawn)
1904-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Oldenzeel in July together with nos. 5-8 for f 3500
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbeling, Utrecht
1939-61 A.L. Ubbens-Ribbius Peletier, Groningen
1961-63 heirs of A.L. Ubbens-Ribbius Peletier
1963 donated to the Centraal Museum, Utrecht

Values:
1904 f 700; 1907 f 1000; 1918 f 5000; 1919 f 5000; 1940 f 5000

5 Mending the nets

The Hague, August 1882
Oil on paper on panel, 42 × 62.5 cm
F7 JH 178
1882-85 V. van Gogh, The Hague/Nuenen
1885-86 A.C. van Gogh-Carbentus, Nuenen/Breda
1886-1902 Schrauwen, Breda
1902 J.C. Couvreur, Breda
1902-03 W. van Bakel and C. Mouwen, Breda
1903-04 Oldenzeel, Rotterdam
1904-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Oldenzeel in July together with nos. 4 and 6-8 for f3500
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1973-75 heirs L.J. Schokking-Ribbius Peletier
1975 Mak van Waay (Amsterdam), 15 April, lot 42, (unsold)
1975-96 H.J. Reinink, Toronto, held by ‘Ribbius Peletier (Canada) Ltd’; private collection

Values:
1904 f700; 1907 f900; 1918 f3500; 1919 f2500; 1936 f4000; 1940 f2500
6 Shepherd with flock beneath a stormy sky

Nuenen, August 1884
Oil on canvas, 67 × 125 cm
F 42 JH 517

1885-86 A.C. van Gogh-Carbentus, Nuenen/Breda
1886-1902 Schrauwen, Breda
1902 J.C. Couvreur, Breda
1902-03 W. van Bakel and C. Mouwen, Breda
1903-04 Oldenzeel gallery, Rotterdam, exhibition in November 1903, no. 45
1904 Fred. Muller (Amsterdam), 3 May, lot 4 (asking price f 800, withdrawn)
1904-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Oldenzeel in July together
with nos. 4, 5, 7 and 8 for f 3500
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1956 E.J. van Wisselingh & Co., Amsterdam
before 1962 Sam Salz, New York (1962 on loan to the Metropolitan Museum, New York)
before September 1962 Martin J. and Sidney A. Zimet;
1963 Sotheby's (London), 23 October, lot 5
1968 Sotheby's (London), 24 April, lot 77
1997 Sotheby's (London), 24 June, lot 10; present location unknown

Values:
1904 f 700; 1907 f 1400; 1918 f 5000; 1919 f 4000; 1940 f 4000
7 Gennep watermill

Nuenen, November 1884
Oil on canvas, 60 × 78.5 cm
F 46 JH 524

1885-86 A.C. van Gogh-Car bentus, Nuenen/Breda
1886-1902 Schrauwen, Breda
1902 J.C. Couvreur, Breda
1902-03 W. van Bakel and C. Mouwen, Breda
1903 Oldenzeel gallery, Rotterdam, exhibition in November, no. 43
1904-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Oldenzeel in July together
with nos. 4-6 and 8 for f 3500
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1939-89 A.E. Ribbius-Peletier, Amsterdam/Scheveningen (from 1949 to 1990
on loan to the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam)
1990 bequeathed to the Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, on long-term loan to the
Noord Brabants Museum, Den Bosch

Values:
1904 f 700; 1907 f 800; 1918 f 3000; 1919 f 2000; 1940 f 2000
8 Woodgatherers in the snow

Nuenen, September 1884
Oil on canvas on panel, 67 × 126 cm
F 43 JH 516

1885-86 A.C. van Gogh-Carbentus, Nuenen/Breda
1886-1902 Schrauwen, Breda
1902 J.C. Couvreur, Breda
1902-03 W. van Bakel and C. Mouwen, Breda
1903-04 Oldenzeel gallery, Rotterdam
1904 Fred. Muller (Amsterdam), 3 May, lot 7 (asking price f°400, withdrawn)
1904-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Oldenzeel in July together
with nos. 4-7 for f°3500
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1939-61 A.L. Ubbens-Ribbius Peletier, Haren
1961-73 L.J. Schokking-Ribbius Peletier, Doorn
1973-c. 88 H.J. Reinink, Toronto, held by ‘Ribbius Peletier (Canada) Ltd’
c. 1990 Gallery Marimura, Tokyo
1991-97 private collection; present location unknown

Values:
1904 f°700; 1905 f°4000; 1907 f°1000; 1918 f°7000; 1919 f°5000; 1940 f°5000
9 View of the Alpilles

Saint-Rémy, June 1889
Oil on canvas, 37.5 × 30.5 cm
F 723 JH 1722

1890 T. van Gogh?
1890-? J. van Gogh-Bonger?
before 1918 C.M. van Gogh, Amsterdam
1918-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought in June for f1800
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1939-89 A.E. Ribbius Peletier, Amsterdam/Scheveningen
1990 bequeathed to the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Values:
1911 f1800; 1918 f4000; 1919 f8000; 1940 f8000
10 Huts; reminiscence of the north

Saint-Rémy, March-April 1890
Oil on canvas, 45.5 × 43 cm
F 673 JH 1919

1890 T. van Gogh
1890-1904 Mrs Chevalier, Auvers-sur-Oise
?-? L. Molina, Paris
?-? Hugo von Tschudi, Munich
before 1914 Carl and Thea Sternheim, La Hulpe-lez-Bruxelles
1919-30 G. Ribbius Peletier, Utrecht, bought from Fred. Muller (Amsterdam),
11 February, lot 11 for f8690
1930-39 A.L. Ribbius Peletier-Wijbelingh, Utrecht
1955 Van Wisselingh & Co., Amsterdam
1956 Knoedler, New York
1956 private collection, Switzerland

Values:
1919 f8690; 1919 f15000; 1936 f16000; 1940 f15000
fig. 1
Theo van Gogh, 1878, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
'Our crown and our honour and our joy': Theo van Gogh's early years

Chris Stolwijk

‘When you were baptised you were adorned with the first May rose to bloom in Zundert. The christening gown which was decorated with the tiny rose no longer fits you and the rose is long since wilted; nevertheless, it remains a symbol of great charm and great affability which may, we pray, be qualities granted to you in life. May you find an abundance of flowers strewn along life's pathway! and make the most of what God gives you to enjoy, so that your heart may be happy and carefree!’ These uplifting words were written by the clergyman Theodorus van Gogh (1822-1885) on 29 April 1876 in a letter to his son Theo (1857-1891) (fig. 1) on the occasion of his 19th birthday.1 Sadly his ardent desire was not to be realised, for on 25 January 1891, at the age of 33, Theo died in the Willem Arntzkliniek in Utrecht where he had been admitted suffering from symptoms of madness in November 1890.2 At the time of his death Theo van Gogh was only well-known among a small group of artists for being Vincent's brother and the enterprising manager of Boussod, Valadon & Cie's (formerly Goupil & Cie), Paris branch at 19, Boulevard Montmartre. It was here that from the 1880s onwards he had dedicated himself to the circulation of the work of popular contemporary artists and artists like Degas, Gauguin, Monet and Pissarro - who were not greatly appreciated at the time.3

Theo's sudden death, less than six months after Vincent's tragic demise, was virtually ignored by the press, but the few lines that were devoted to him invariably highlighted his exceptional merits as an art-dealer. His friend Jan Veth commemorated his early death in De Amsterdammer, referring to him as a ‘courageous young man,’ who ‘[had] worked with selfless and serene perseverance for what to him seemed noble in the art of painting.’4 In the eyes of another friend, the painter-critic J.J. Isaacson, he was even more laudable as he had been ‘one of the boldest champions’

+ With thanks to Elly Cassee, Leo Jansen, Melisande Lips, Hans Luijten and Benno Tempel.
1 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 2743 V/1982: ‘Toen gi j gedoopt wer d had men u versierd met het eerste mei-rosje dat toen in Zundert ontloken was. Het kleedje wat met het roosje versierd was, past u niet meer en ook het roosje mage langeverwelkt zijn, toch blijf het een symbool van veel lievelijks en van veel vriendelijks, dat uw leven, naar we u bidden, u moge opleveren. Vind nog maar veel bloemen op uw levenspad! en geniet het goed, dat God u te genieten geeft, met een blij en opgeruimd hart!’
of the Parisian art world, a man, ‘who fought for his artists, suffered alongside them and sacrificed himself for their cause.’

In the ever expanding literature on Van Gogh, Theo's life and work are, however, almost always viewed solely in the light of Vincent's career. Their unrivalled


6 See, for example, G. Kraus, De verhouding van Theo en Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam 1954; G.J.A. Manders and M.E. Tralbaut, De gebroeders van Gogh, Zundert 1964; and J. Hulsker, Vincent and Theo: a dual biography, Ann Arbor 1990.
correspondence which, due to the loss of the majority of Theo's letters, primarily reflects Vincent's view of events, provides insight into their unique relationship. This was reflected in Theo's unfailing financial and moral support of Vincent in his struggle to make a name for himself as an artist, in their shared interest in the art and literature of the day, and in Theo's various activities as a dealer.

This article will be the first to focus exclusively on Theo's younger years, up to 1880. Based on previously unpublished family correspondence, it will trace the early development of a dealer who was ultimately to play a particularly important role in Parisian artistic life. Theo's career began on 1 January 1873 when his uncle Vincent van Gogh (1820-1888) (fig. 2) mediated in obtaining an appointment for him at a gallery that had previously been in the hands of another uncle, Hendrik Vincent van Gogh (1815-1877). Theo began as the youngest salesman at this Brussels branch of Goupil, situated on the 58, Rue Montagne de la Cour. In November of that same year he was transferred to the Hague; eventually, in October 1879, he moved permanently to Paris, where he ran the gallery on the Boulevard Montmartre until his nervous breakdown on 9 October 1890.

‘Glorious Zundert!’

Theo, born on 1 May 1857 in Zundert, spent the greatest part of his youth in this fairly large country community in the province of Brabant. Throughout his life Theo, like Vincent, remembered these carefree days in and around the attractive village parsonage with great fondness. His sister Lies maintained that she and Theo had

7 Uncle Cent, as he was known, had been a partner in Goupil & Cie from 1861. In the 1830s, uncle Hendrik (Hein) had dealt in books and art in Rotterdam; his business was taken over by C.S.J.V. Oldenzeel (1833-1896) in 1858. During the years 1861-63 Hein probably worked in The Hague with E. Reinhold (1841-1867) in setting up Goupil's new branch. After that he left for Brussels, where he established yet another branch. In late 1872 he became seriously ill and was no longer able to manage the business. It was subsequently taken over by V. Schmidt. See Chris Stolwijk. *Uit de schilderswereld: Nederlandse kunstschilders in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw*, Leiden 1998, p. 313.
never again experienced ‘so much pleasure’ as that enjoyed during those ‘pleasant years back in Zundert.’ The Van Goghs were a close-knit family living in mutual harmony, once described as ‘[a] truly friendly gathering of [...] dear Parents and the dear young ones’ (figs. 3 and 4).  

Theo's parents. Reformed Protestants of the moderate ‘Groninger school,’ gave their children a sound upbringing, emphasising simplicity and charity, a sense of duty and decency, and the acquisition of culture. In their letters to the young Theo his parents constantly reminded him of these honourable middle-class values. This is best illustrated by his father's words when he arrived in Brussels in January 1873: ‘Never lose sight of your goal, namely to become independent and clever and efficient, and always stick to your principles. Happiness is only to be found along the path of propriety and true pioussness.’ Up to this point Theo had not disappointed his parents: for his mother he was, and was to remain, ‘our crown and our honour and our joy.’

Unlike Vincent, who attended the village school in Zundert, Theo was first educated privately by a governess, Anke Maria Schuil (1850-?), from July 1867 to June 1869, and in all probability by Jeanne Struik as well. After the family moved to Helvoirt in 1871 Theo had to brave the elements to walk to school in Oisterwijk every day. He attended the ‘non-subsidised Independent School for more extensive basic education at the Lindeind,’ taking classes in French, German, English and Maths. It was not a great success. The poor results, the long distance he had to travel, and probably the fees as well, made Theo's father decide

9 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 2506 V/1982: ‘[...] dat regt vriendschappelijk zamenzijn van uw lieve Ouderen en de lieve jonge jeugd.’
12 Anke Maria Schuil is listed on the municipal register for Zondert (1860-90) as living at the same address as the Van Gogh family (Molenstraat, district A, no. 39) from 5 July 1867 to 26 June 1869. She left for Leeuwarden. Jeanne Struik, whom Theo was still in contact with in The Hague, does not appear on the municipal register nor in the servants' register. (With thanks to E.T.G. Sier of from the Regional Record Office of West-Brabant.) In 1864 Vincent went to Zevenbergen to a public school and after this attended a school for higher secondary education in Tilburg.
13 This day school, which also took boarders, was set up in 1862. Lessons were given in French, German, English, Mathematics and drawing. From July 1865 to August 1874 Cornelis Adriaan Heintz (1824-?) was head of the school. Nicolaas Felix (1849-?), whom Hulsker refers to as head of the school, did not take on this position until 1884, much after Theo had left: Hulsker, op. cit. (note 6), p. 40. (With thanks to Frans van Zutphen of the Tilburg municipal archives.)
to call an early halt to his school career at the end of 1872, and to subsequently search for a post suitable to his talents. Uncle Cent eventually provided the solution, just as he had done for Vincent in 1869. As a partner in Goupil's, Theo's father's favourite brother - a man of great wealth - was able to arrange a post in this international firm of art-dealers. And so Theo became the youngest salesman at the Brussels gallery. Vincent, who had been working at another branch for almost four years, was delighted, and sent word to Theo that same month: ‘I am so glad that you are working for the
same firm, too. It is a superb business, the longer you are in it the more ambition you develop. It is perhaps more difficult than other professions at the start, but if you stick to it doggedly you will make a success of it in the end."\footnote{3/3: \textquoteleft Ik ben toch zo blij dat je ook in deze zaak zit. Het is zo'n prachtige zaak, hoe langer men erin is, hoe meer ambitie krijgt men erin. Het begin is misschien wel moeilijker dan in iets anders, maar houd je maar taaï & je zult er wel komen.\textquoteright \ See also 2/2.}

\section*{Brussels}

The change from rural Helvoirt to the bustling metropolis of Brussels was a major one. At that time the city was flourishing economically, socially and culturally. The population had grown tempestuously, and by 1873 numbered some 150,000 inhabitants. The city underwent a true metamorphosis when the old architectural structure, with its numerous narrow, dark alleyways, made way for the construction of wide avenues on which majestic public buildings and apartment blocks soon rose. Dealers also profited from these favourable economic conditions. From the early 1860s onwards their number increased steadily in a city which had already harboured a sizeable group of painters since time immemorial. By the time Theo started his new job there were no fewer than 32 galleries. Maison Goupil was situated in the centre of the renowned Brussels dealers' quarter, where major players like Bernheim-Jeune and H. Leroy Fils could also be found (fig. 5).\footnote{Saskia de Bodt, \textit{Halverwege Parijs: Willem Roelofs en de Nederlandse schilderskolonie in Brussel 1840-1890}, (diss., University of Amsterdam, 1955) pp. 65-66.}

The Belgian capital made a great impression on Theo. His parents, who had watched him leave home for good at such a tender age, tried to offer him some guidance in their numerous letters, which were full of good advice and always encouraging: \textquoteleft Be brave. You have now taken the first steps which may lead to an
independent life, should God give you his blessing.’ Vincent wrote similar messages, whilst his sister Anna admonished him to follow Vincent's example and advised him to do everything in his power to become a gentleman.

At first Theo lived in the house of Reverend Van den Brink, with whom he was taking confirmation classes. On Sunday he attended church with his housemate Bouwmeester and went for long walks, whilst in the evening hours he followed bookkeeping lessons and tried to master the French language. Both these skills were essential if he were to improve his position in the firm. In order to combat the loneliness of the big city, the 15-year-old joined a youth club, which in his mother's view would not only enable him to

17 3/3.
18 At the beginning of June 1873 he moved to Mr Schmidt's house.
meet people of his own age, but - above all - would act as 'a safeguard against bad influences.' And there was certainly an abundance of bad influences in Brussels: the city was a bustling international trade centre and was widely known to be brimming over with luxury and 'little pleasures.'

However, it also had a lot to offer Theo in the field of contemporary art. In addition to his direct contact with pictures at work, he was able to roam around in the Musée Moderne, housed in the Palais Ducal, not to mention visit the exhibitions of the Cercle Artistique, the Société des Artistes, the Société Libre des Beaux-Arts, and the Société Belge des Aquarellistes, all of which enabled him to keep in touch with the latest developments in the field of fine art.

Considering how young he was and how far away from home, Theo adjusted remarkably quickly. He thrived on his work. His parents responded enthusiastically to the steady stream of favourable reports, and constantly encouraged him to continue along the same lines, obeying his manager's orders to the letter: 'Do your very best to devote yourself to the business and to the interests of Mr Schmidt, so that he will be increasingly convinced that he can rely on you and see that it gives you satisfaction to excel.' During this period a lively correspondence developed between Theo and Vincent, in which Vincent asserted himself quite definitely as his younger brother's mentor.

Working under the guidance of his manager, Mr V. Schmidt, Theo had to carry out the usual tasks performed by a young assistant, such as 'packing and unpacking' paintings, 'covering photos and etchings with tissue paper, helping to box paintings.' After having worked hard for a month, he could write to his parents with great pride in February 1873 that he had earned his first wages. His income was a welcome addition to the family's tight budget and his father replied with great pleasure by return of post: 'How marvellous it is that you are now working towards making yourself a valuable asset and towards independence, I would imagine that it must have been a wonderful feeling to receive your first 30 fr.'s earnings. So you are helping already and now I only need to pay 50 instead of 80 fr. a month.'

Although still extremely young, Theo rapidly grew into his responsibilities. Around 25 June, the then 16-year-old assistant sold his first work, a momentous occasion on which his father congratulated him: 'Have another shot at it using the same tactics...'

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21 Ibid., pp. 70-93.
22 4/4.
23 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 2630 V/1982: 'At... doe maar al uw best om u te wijden aan de zaak en aan de belangen van den heer Schmidt, opdat hij de overtuiging meer en meer krijge dat Hij op u kan rekenen en dat gij er uw genoegen In vindt om uit te munter.
24 See, for example, 15/12.

as you did this week with the Brussels gentlemen, it must feel good to sell something. In the course of 1873 Theo's position in the firm steadily improved. At the beginning of July he was introduced to H.G. Tersteeg (1845-1927) and Ch. Obach, respectively the managers of Goupil's Hague and London branches. From 25 August to 6 September, during Schmidt's absence. Theo was allowed - temporarily - to perform the managerial duties for his branch; this enabled him, among other things, to converse with the Count of Flanders.

Theo's progress could not fail to be noticed, not least by Mr Schmidt's superiors. Uncle Cent, who would

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27 Ibid., letter b 2638 V/1982: ‘Doe nog maar eens meer zoo een slagje als van de week met die Brusselsche heeren, dat moet een prettig gevoel zijn zoo wat te verkopen.’
hear ‘not a word spoken against him,’ decided in September, after consulting Theo's parents and Tersteeg, to transfer him in November to the gallery in The Hague. The exact reasons for this move are not known; according to Theo's father, there were ‘many [reasons] that converged.’ Leaving Brussels caused Theo a great deal of pain, as he had worked there ‘contentedly’ and ‘cheerfully.’ Schmidt would also have liked to see him stay a little longer, but ultimately agreed to Theo's transfer, which, after all, amounted to a definite promotion. In his letter of reference Schmidt was very complementary about Theo's work: ‘[…] j'ai toute raison d'exprimer ma satisfaction entière, tant sur sa conduite que sur le zèle qu'il a témoigné pendant ce laps de temps.’ Theo had taken his first real steps towards becoming an art-dealer.

**The Hague**

On 12 November 1873 Theo began his new job at the Hague gallery, which at the time was located at Plaats 14 (fig. 6). Theo lodged with a family by the name of Roos, who lived at the Lange Beestenmarkt 32, where Vincent had also lived happily for years. He settled in quickly. The ‘largest village’ in the Netherlands was not in the least like Brussels, but during this period The Hague, too, began to emulate a big city style. In the early 1870s the city, which already housed the court and government, also developed into an artistic centre. Its rural setting, the presence of

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29 Ibid., letter b2661 V/1982. In any case, Theo's hard work in Brussels had served him well and an assistant was about to leave the Hague branch.
a great number of wealthy residents, an art academy, a flourishing artists' association, and a number of important galleries made it an excellent choice for painters like Bernard Blommers, Jozef Israëls, Anton Mauve and Hendrik Willem Mesdag, all of whom settled there permanently. During this era they joined the city's artist population, which had traditionally been quite sizeable, and already included Johannes Bosboom, the brothers Jacob and Willem Maris, and Hendrik Jan Weissenbruch. Together they gave a new, powerful momentum
to Dutch genre and landscape painting, soon to be called the Hague School by the critic Van Santen Kolf.

Theo’s new place of work, which had opened its doors in The Hague in 1861, played a major role in the circulation of the work of these painters. Under the inspiring leadership of H.G. Tersteeg, who became manager in 1868, this branch expanded from the early 1870s onward to become one of the leading galleries in Europe, distributing pictures by the Hague School masters on an international scale. In contrast to the traditional - and less hazardous - commission business, Goupil's adopted the new approach of speculative investment: purchasing the work of a select number of artists for a set price, with the aim of selling it at a large profit some time in the future. The work was subsequently exhibited in a tasteful exhibition space, and was circulated on a large scale among the art-loving public through photographic reproductions. Like no one else, Goupil made successful use of this novel business approach and sales technique.

It was for this rapidly expanding company that Theo went to work. In the 1860s the Hague branch had acted mainly as an intermediary for the work of French Salon painters like Bouguereau and Girardet, but in Theo’s period it experienced an explosive growth in the sale of contemporary (Dutch) art. At the gallery he could daily peruse paintings by David Artz, Blommers, Bosboom, Israëls, the Maris brothers, Mauve (fig. 7) - whose studio Theo visited regularly - and Philip Sadée, artists who in the 1870s could barely keep up with the demand for their work. Theo was also able to view work produced by the Hague School masters at the triennial Levende Meesters shows, the exhibitions at Pulchri Studio, and at the tasteful presentations organised by the prestigious Hollandsche Teeken-Maatschappij (Dutch Watercolour Society), which were held annually from 1876 in the rooms of the Teeken-Academie on the Princessegracht.


34 The work of Dutch masters like Bisschop, Bles, Bosboom, Israëls, Leickert, Springer, Verschuur and Verveer was only being sold on a modest scale before Theo's time: Stolwijk, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 211-12.

Theo's career thrived during these years. On 14 November 1873 Tersteeg gave him a responsible assignment for a commission in Utrecht which, according to his mother, Tersteeg would never 'have given to a small-time dealer or someone who didn't already have a good reputation.' He also received independent clients in the firm's busy salon and he participated in drawing up the annual inventory. After Goupil's had moved to its new premises at Plaats 20 in November 1875, Theo found that the amount of responsibility Tersteeg delegated to him increased steadily. From 1876 onwards he undertook the annual spring tour to various business relations around the country in order to show the firm's nouveautés. According to Vincent, who was about to leave Goupil's for good, it was a 'good thing' that Theo was given this charge. In his view the business tour was a 'good

36 Despite the fact that in February 1874 Theo is said to have written to his sister Anna that Tersteeg was not friendly towards him: Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 2689 V/1982.
37 Ibid., letter b 2673 V/1982. Theo probably did business in Utrecht with Theodoor Soeterik (1810-1883). Whether he did or not, this Utrecht artist, lithographer and art-dealer is known to have bought David Bles's *Le grand mode* for f3000, and Cornelis Springer's *Vue à Leiden* for f325, from Goupil's on 20 November. See The Hague, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), Maison Goupil archive. On Soeterik see Stolwijk, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 354-55.
exercise,’ which would offer Theo the opportunity to see ‘a great number of beautiful things.’ His boss, in short, had enough reason to be pleased with Theo, and regularly sent his parents a good ‘progress report.’

On the road to adulthood

Although Theo's career was developing to everyone's satisfaction, in his personal life he suffered blow upon blow when in 1875 two friends and his first love, Annet Haanebeek, died within six months of one another. The sudden demise of his friend and housemate Johannes Weehuizen, with whom Theo had spent many evenings reading from Jules Michelet's L'amour and who died a lonely death on 4 March 1875, moved Theo deeply. In a letter to Vincent dated 7 September, he expressed feelings of guilt: why had he not been able to help his friend in the proper way? Similar feeling of inadequacy were to plague him in entirely different circumstances later on.

The death of Annet, only three months later (14 June), threw him even further off balance. Vincent tried to comfort him by sending him a photograph of a painting by Philippe de Champaigne, about which Michelet - whom Vincent adored and Theo was familiar with - had written: ‘Elle m’est restée 30 ans, me revenant sans cesse.’ Vincent did not think that Theo would forget Annet; the memory of her and her death could make him ‘miserable but always happy’. However, happiness for Theo was no longer to be found in The Hague. At the beginning of July 1875 he first intimated to Vincent that he wanted to leave the city - which now seemed to have changed into a scene of calamity - and move to Paris or London.

In this difficult period Theo did not seek so much the comfort of religion as that of poetry, particularly in the work of Friedrich Rückert. But one doubts whether the, in Vincent's view, ‘moving’ and beautiful lines from ‘Aus der Jugendzeit’ and ‘Um Mitternacht’ would have cheered him up. Stanzas like ‘Aus der Jugendzeit, Aus der Jugendzeit / klingt ein Lied mir immerdar; / O wie liegt so weit, o wie liegt so weit, / Was mein einst war,’ and ‘Um Mitternacht / hab' ich gedacht / hinaus in dunkle Schranken / Es hat kein Lichtgedanken / Mir Trost gebracht / Um Mitternacht’ would

38 69/55.
39 Thanks to his earnings, Theo was also able to considerably reduce his family's financial worries. In 1873 he was already earning about f 35. a month, as much as the rent of his lodgings. In January 1874 he was given a three guilders' pay rise. In subsequent years this was then the month in which his salary was always increased.
40 The two friends were his housemates Johannes Wilhelms Weehuizen (1852-1875), who was a 'civil servant,' and Willem Laurens Frederik Kiehl (1852-1875). On Theo and Annet Haanebeek, who was also his cousin, see Elly Cassee, ‘In love: Vincent van Gogh's first true love,’ Van Gogh Museum Journal (1996), pp. 109-17.
41 35/28. See also ibid., p. 111.
42 45/36a.
43 36/29 and 37/30. Around 15 July Vincent specifically asked uncle Cent - who was visiting him in Paris - if there might not be a position available for Theo there; see 38/31.
have been more likely to lead Theo to the painful realisation of the irreversibility of events.\textsuperscript{44}

His father, who had noticed that Theo had become rather despondent as a result of all these dramatic events, took him into his confidence on a number of occasions between July and October 1875. On 8 July he tried to make it clear to Theo that his melancholy mood was potentially damaging, writing: ‘giving in to melancholy is not conducive to the generation of energy.’ In his view young people were to behave in just the opposite way: they should be ‘youthful, happy, and jolly’; he advised Theo not to restrict his social life solely to the Haanebeek family, where, due to the sad circumstances, it was likely that a ‘too melancholy’ atmosphere and the ‘lack of a pleasant’ ambience would dominate.\textsuperscript{45} After the death of Theo's housemate Kiehl on 22 September, he wrote in a pastoral tone: ‘Dear Theo! You already know, I imagine, the difficulties of life, do not let it make you lose your cheerfulness. There is still much goodness, fight hard for this, and what a fight it is to be good, to be truly good. But there is also help at hand in your fight. And prayer gives strength and support [...] We are old friends!’\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} In October 1874 he first allowed his parents a glimpse of his misgivings. Vincent thanked Theo for sending him Rückert's ‘Aus der Jugendzeit’ and ‘Um Mitternacht’ (39/32).

\textsuperscript{45} Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 2346 V/1982.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., letter b 2366 V/1982: ‘Beste Theo! Gij kent ook al, naar ik mij verbeeld, de moeite van het leven, verlies er de opgewektheid niet door. Er is altijd ook veel goeds, strijd zeker ook veel, en wat is er een strijd noodig om goed, waarlijk goed te zijn. Maar er is ook hulp in dien strijd. En het gebed geeft kracht en steun [...] We zijn oude vrienden!’ Vincent also tried to cheer Theo up: see 51/39a, 52/40 and 53/41.
Although they were understandably worried about Theo being so shaken by events, it was primarily Vincent of whom they despaired from late 1875.\footnote{Already on 28 October 1874 Theo's father wrote a letter to Theo in which he referred to Vincent as an ‘eccentric.’ After leaving for Paris on 11 October 1874, the latter had not written for a few weeks; Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 2728 V/1982.} In January 1876, when it had become certain that Vincent would soon leave Goupil's, his parents went so far as to confide their worries to Theo: ‘We feel the need to write to you again, but it is not cheerful news. This business with Vincent continues to worry us terribly. [...] We are bitterly distressed. [...] All of this has caused us a great deal of pain. He has rejected such a lot! What a bitter disappointment for Uncle Cent. What a loss and what a shame.’\footnote{Ibid., letter b 2227 V/1982: ‘We hebben behoeftte weer aan U te schrijven, maar ’t is geen opwakkend schrijven. De zaak van Vincent blijft ons vreselijke zorg geven. [...] We zijn bitter bedroefd. [...] Om alles doet het ons vreselijke pijn. Wat heeft hij veel verschopt! Wat bitter leed voor Oom Cent. Wat schaade en schande.’} From that moment onwards, all their hopes were placed on Theo and his future. His mother addressed him in April 1877 in the following way: ‘You must and shall be our joy and honour! We cannot do without it!’\footnote{Ibid., letter b 2520 V/1982: ‘Gij moet en zult zijn onze vreugd en eere! We kunnen daar niet buiten!’} With an even greater tenacity and determination she constantly encouraged him to become independent so that he would ‘later have his own circle in which to live and work.’\footnote{Ibid., letter b 2520 V/1982: ‘Gij moet en zult zijn onze vreugd en eere! We kunnen daar niet buiten!’} For advice and help he could, as his father had written in March, always rely on him, because ‘you know you have a father, who would also like to be a brother to you.’\footnote{Ibid., letter b 2551 V/1982.}

At 18 years of age Theo was thus already been saddled with the heavy burden of fulfilling his parents exaggerated expectations in order to allow them to forget the ‘damage and shame’ of Vincent's unsuccessful stint as an art-dealer. In future he also had to fill the diplomatic role of intermediary between his parents and Vincent, whose relationship was permanently strained by feelings of guilt and disappointment, since the former believed Vincent's career to have taken a disastrous turn.\footnote{See, for example, his father's letter to Theo of 16 August 1877: ibid., letter b 2551 V/1982.} Theo hardly had time to get over the events of the summer of 1875; during these years he was forced to become an adult swiftly.

\section*{Crossed in love}

Theo did indeed need advice in the spring of 1877, but his parents were not the obvious people to turn to in the matter. He had recently met a woman and fallen in love, but unfortunately for him his parents could in no way reconcile themselves to his choice: a woman of lower social standing, who, in addition, had a child to care for. In February he had been forbidden to associate with her. This resolute rejection
left Theo ‘sad and so alone.’ And no matter how much his parents subsequently tried to cheer him up, or his father impress upon him that ‘keeping busy and [reading] good books or history studies’ would make it possible for him to forget her quickly, Theo continued to think about her. In his letters to Vincent he went into ‘the business’ in great detail, but although Vincent sympathised, he ultimately came to the same conclusion as his father. In Vincent's view, Theo was torn between two people and he had to choose between her and his father, to which he immediately added that his father's love was obviously ‘of greater value.’

In spite of disapproval, and flying in the face of wise empathy and advice, Theo met the woman once again in May. His father then pulled out all the stops, writing to Theo on 21 May in a clearly agitated style that the woman, in view of her background, could never be ‘sincere and honest’: ‘That is why such an attachment is so wretched and abhorrent, because it lacks any moral foundation and is based on material interest, combined with sexual desire. A person, a young person from a good background like yourself, would be throwing away his talents if he were once again tempted to restart a relationship for which he could not expect to receive God's

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53 86/68.
54 110/90. On 14 May 1882 Vincent referred to this question once again: see 198/169.
blessing.' He tried to frighten Theo by confronting him with the off-putting example of his uncle Jan Carbentus (1827-1875), who had also opted for a woman of lower rank and in so doing had eventually met with disaster.

The message was clear. After this Theo avoided the woman's company, although for a long time it made him quite unhappy. Once again he blamed himself for what had happened, and wrote that he would like to leave ‘everything’ behind, because: ‘I am the cause of it all and only bring grief to other people, I alone have caused this misery for myself and others.’ Theo could see only one way out: to leave The Hague as soon as possible. Vincent, with whom he once again discussed the opportunities for a transfer to Paris or London, wrote him the following words, which were later to prove prophetic: ‘There is something greater in the future, my conscience predicts.’ The future, however, was still a distant prospect. For the time being Theo had simply to remain in The Hague: according to his father, there was no room for him at the other branches of Goupil. He wrote: ‘In your position, I would therefore continue to concentrate on the daily matters, but with ambition and [good spirits] so that people can say: he is a person who is on the alert and pragmatic.’

Farewell to The Hague

Fortunately Theo was given the opportunity to escape The Hague for a while in October 1877, when Tersteeg sent him on the autumn tour to Goupil's various business relations around the country. His mother felt the trip would offer Theo new perspectives for the future after the events of the previous months: ‘Who knows,’ she wrote ‘on your travels you may just meet the girl meant for you.’ She was quite obviously mistaken, as it seems unlikely Theo would have been able to think about a new ‘girl’ so soon after his unfortunate affair.

In the winter of 1877-78 Theo slowly but surely returned from the abyss into which he had been precipitated during the summer of 1875. He sent good news to his parents as he had done in the past. His father could thus write to him happily at the end of January: ‘letters like that make one feel better and it makes us happy to be told that

55 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 2532 V/1982: ‘Daarom is zulk eene betrekking zoo ellendig en verfoeilijk, omdat zij elken zedelijken grondslag mist en gebaseerd is op materieel belang, vereenigd met zinnelijke lust. Een mensch, een jong mensch van goed huize gelijk gij zijt, gij zoudt u weg werpen indien gij opnieuw U verloken liet om een relatie aan te knopen, waarop gij geen zegen wachten kunt.’
56 117/98: ‘[...] ik ben de oorzaak van alles en doe anderen slechts verdriet, ik alleen heb deze ellende over mijzelve en anderen gebracht.’
57 188/R6.
58 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 2535 V/1982: ‘Ik zou dus, in uw plaats, maar met ambitie en [goeden moed] mij blijven toelegen op het dagelijks voorkomende en zorgen dat men zeggen kan: hij is iemand, die op zijn quivive is en die practisch is.’ Theo could have had a job as the youngest assistant in the Parisian branch, but this position would have been an obvious demotion. His father and uncle Cent impressed upon him the need to wait until a better position became available.
59 Ibid., letter b 2559 V/1982: ‘[...] wie weet of je nog niet eens op je reis ontmoet wie U ooit je meisje kan worden.’
you are pleased with your work and that you have a clear view of life.' It was obvious, though, that Theo would probably leave The Hague within the foreseeable future. His request to be transferred, made on his part to the ‘Goupil court of appeal’ by his uncle Cent and Tersteeg, was now being followed with interest by the family. In March 1878 a piece of good news arrived unexpectedly: the ‘gentlemen from Paris’ had made Theo an offer to go to the French capital for a few months. His parents, despite their worries about Theo's visit to the metropolis, were pleased with this ‘important news,’ and intimated that his stay there could have an ‘important influence’ on his career as a dealer.

After having once again undertaken the annual spring tour for Tersteeg, Theo left for Paris on 1 May 1878, his 19th birthday. He took a room at 46, Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, which Vincent considered to be ‘quite a decent neighbourhood,’ reminiscent of the paintings of E. Frère. Paris was obviously on quite a different scale from either Brussels or The Hague, and in the summer of 1878 it was particularly overcrowded, mainly with visitors to the Exposition Universelle. According to an anonymous Dutch witness, the city looked ‘cheerful and lively’; he even went so far as to describe it as a ‘sixth continent, where the inhabitants of the other five have gathered together.’

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60 Ibid., letter b 0964 V/1962: ‘Zulke brieven knappen een mensch op en maakt het ons gelukkig te vernemen dat gij ingenomen zijt met uw werk en dat gij het leven met een helder oog beziet.’
61 Ibid., letter b 2572 V/1982.
63 143/122.
64 [Anonymous,] De Wereldtentoonstelling van 1878 te Parijs, Amsterdam 1878, p. 275.
was greatly impressed by ‘the chaos of confusion and commotion’ he encountered there. His worried father, who pretended to be a tried and true globe-trotter, advised him to be perpetually on his guard: ‘do not accept every offer of friendship unquestioningly, remember the intrigues that are attributed to that metropolis! [...] watch your step.’

Theo, who had thought he would be put to work at one of Goupil's galleries, was assigned instead to help with the stand at the Exposition, which opened on the Champs de Mars on 1 May for a period of 6 months. His mother thought he had been given this unique opportunity in order to ‘study [the] representatives from every nation and folk [and] to observe their charms and their defects.’

Theo did not disappoint his superiors in Paris either. His successful stay strengthened him in his resolve to arrange a permanent transfer. His influential uncle Cent, who - according to Father Van Gogh - had ‘fixed part of his hopes on [Theo]’ after Vincent's failed career, was still convinced that the young man should first spend some more time working in The Hague, waiting until a better position became available in Paris. After the exhibition closed on 15 November Theo returned to the Netherlands.

Once back in The Hague, Theo improved his position considerably. He made a favourable financial agreement with Tersteeg whereby from April 1879 he would share in the profits of the gallery, which in those years could easily have risen to quite considerable sums.

Theo's last year in The Hague was dominated by his forthcoming departure for Paris. Despite the fact that he was so busy (in the spring he once again undertook the customary tour) and despite the renewal of old friendships, he felt out of place in the city. According to his sister Lies, he was imprisoned there like ‘a canary on its perch.’

His patience was indeed tried to the limit. On 29 May he discussed his future plans with Tersteeg in great detail; the latter, as the spokesman for Goupil and Boussod, was only able to offer him a minor position as an assistant in one of the Parisian branches (fig. 8). Theo was sorely disappointed, but his father saw some advantages in the offer. By taking this ‘most modest post’ - a real ‘starter's position’ - Theo

65 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 0977 V/1962: ‘[…] vertrouw niet onvoorwaardelijk elke aangeboden vriendschap, denk aan intrigeren! dat wel wordt toegeschreven aan die wereldstad! (...) pas maar op uw tellen.’
67 During his stay he met up with, among others, Tersteeg, uncle Cor, uncle Cent, the Haman family, Willem van Stockum, Piet Boele - a friend of Caroline Haanebeek's - and Dr Spanjaard. He was also invited to a dinner given by Goupil's at the end of October.
68 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 0987 V/1962. On 7 October 1878 uncle Cent wrote to Theo that ‘my opinion is still that the best thing for you would be to return to The Hague for a while, and I am sticking to that idea, as long as I cannot see how to find anything better for you’ (b 5342 V/1984).
69 On his way back he met Vincent, who had now quit his theology studies, in Brussels. They discussed many matters and one of the places they visited was the Museum van Schone Kunsten; see 147/126.
70 Stolwijk, op. cit. (note 7), pp. 216 (table 14) and 218 (table 15).
would not ‘incite envy’ among his colleagues and he would also be given every chance to work his way up. On the other hand, the salary could indeed prove to be a problem.\textsuperscript{72} In consultation with uncle Cent and Tersteeg it was eventually decided that Theo's transfer would be postponed until October.

On 15 August, while awaiting his departure, he visited Vincent in the Borinage, where the later had been living since December 1878. It was to be a memorable meeting. According to Vincent, the hours they spent together had assured him that they were still ‘in the land of the living,’ but it had also become obvious to him that they were slowly growing apart. During their conversation the ambitious Theo, who was about to take a further decisive step in his already so successful career, had, on behalf of his parents and sister Anna, made it painfully clear to Vincent that he must one day take care of himself and cease living off a ‘private income.’\textsuperscript{73} This resulted in their meeting coming to an abrupt end and a long separation. Vincent found Theo's claim that he was the cause of ‘so much discord, misery and sorrow amongst us and in our house’ unbearable, and thus severed all contact with his brother.\textsuperscript{74} Ultimately, it was not until July 1880 that the brothers got in touch with one another again.\textsuperscript{75} By that time, Theo had already

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., letter b 2481 V/1982.
\textsuperscript{73} 153/132.
\textsuperscript{74} 153/132.
\textsuperscript{75} 154/133.
been working in Paris as an assistant at the Boulevard Monmartre gallery for more than eight months.  

Shared interests

Theo's development as a dealer and his interest in (contemporary) art and literature was partly due to Vincent's inspirational role. From 1873 his older brother had regularly encouraged him to send descriptions of works he had seen and to catalogue them, to read certain books and periodicals, and also to visit museums in order to become acquainted with older paintings (fig. 9). In this regard Vincent wrote in January 1873: ‘Above all, you must write to me about what paintings you have seen and what you consider to be good.’ Or, on 19 November 1873: ‘You must write and tell me some time which painters you like best, both the old and the new [...] You should go to the museum frequently, it is good that you also know old painters and, if it is feasible, read about art and particularly periodicals about art [like] the Gazette des Beaux-Arts etc.’ Vincent thus stimulated Theo to formulate his judgments on art and literature at a young age. By the end of January 1873, to Vincent's delight, Theo was able to write

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76 The Hague municipal register records that Theo left for Paris on 6 October 1879. It is likely that he visited his parents in Etten before his final departure.
77 3/3: ‘Ge moet mij vooral schrijven wat je alzo voor schilderijen ziet & wat je mooi vindt.’
favourably about a painting by the Belgian history painter Cluysenaer, a work by Alfred Stevens and one by Rotta, which Vincent knew personally.79

Theo always maintained that his love of, and interest in, art was entirely due to Vincent. On 26 July 1887, in what is presumed to be his first letter to Jo Bonger, who was later to become his wife, he wrote about his brother's role as a cultural mentor: ‘15 years ago now he was in the firm of Goupil, too, and it looked as if he was going to have a promising career with them. When I first started, he took me under his wing, (even though he lived in London and I in The Hague) and I owe my love of art to him.’80 Although Vincent's part in the development of Theo's interests and taste must not be underestimated, Theo's own modesty can also be read between the lines here, for ‘love of art’ cannot be taught, at the very most it can be encouraged. This encouragement from his older brother, who in 1873 had already been working in the art business for a few years and who was well-informed about art, particularly contemporary art, was not wasted. In January 1874 Vincent wrote elatedly: ‘From your letter I can see that art is dear to you, and that is a good thing, my dear fellow.’81

Theo's earliest acquaintance with contemporary art was probably made in Princenhage, where his uncle Cent had taken up residence in March 1871 and where he housed his extensive collection. Here, Theo was in a position to see work by the most important contemporary masters: Corot, Daubigny, Delaroche, Gérôme, Israëls, Von Marcke, Jacob Maris, Meissonier and Schelfhout.82 After joining Goupil's, his knowledge and taste was largely determined by what he saw at work. In addition to paintings, this included drawings, watercolours, and numerous reproductions, which were successfully marketed by Goupil in the form of series entitled Galérie Photographique and Musée Goupil. On Vincent's initiative and with his help, Theo began to collect these straight away. The reproductions enhanced his knowledge, moulded his taste, and eventually formed the foundation of an extensive collection, which the brothers compiled together.83

79 3/3.
80 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, family correspondence, letter b 4284 V/1984: ‘Nu 15 jaar geleden was hij ook in de zaak van Goupil & beloofde een mooie carrière te zullen maken. Hij nam mij, toen ik pas begon, (al woonde hij in Londen & ik te ’s Hage) onder zijne bescherming & het is aan hem dat ik mijn liefde voor kunst te danken heb.’
81 17/13: ‘Uit je brief zag ik dat je hart hebt voor kunst, & dat is een goed ding, kerel.’

In the early 1870s Theo's interest was chiefly focused on the work of famous Old Masters such as Hals and Rembrandt, and on the contemporary work sold by Goupil, like that of Jacque, Schreyer, Lambinet and De Cock, who, according to Vincent, was ‘one of the few painters who understood our Brabant intimately.’ His introduction to Millet's *Angelus* (fig. 10), which was on view in Brussels in 1873, resulted in a lifelong admiration for the work of this celebrated master, whose painting also had a special significance for Vincent. This can already be seen in the following comment: ‘Yes, that painting of Millet's, *L'angélus du soir*, that is the real thing - that is rich, that is poetry.’

In addition to the work of Millet, Theo had a special interest in Barbizon painters like Corot, Daubigny and Rousseau, whose pictures were circulated by Goupil on a grand scale. In this sense, it was only logical that during
his stay in The Hague he developed a fondness for the subdued painting of the Hague School (fig. 11), which he saw daily at the gallery. In contrast to the Salon artists mentioned earlier, on the whole he continued to look upon them favourably even later on. In the paintings of the Hague School masters, and the impressionists and post-impressionists which Theo was later to promote in Paris, there was a personal touch that was missing in the bulk of work by the Salon painters. All the same, as the manager of the gallery on the Boulevard Montmartre, he scarcely sold any work by the Hague School; not only was there relatively little demand for it in France, but also most transactions were executed through the branch on the Place de l'Opéra.

With his definitive departure from The Hague and his move to Paris in November 1879, Theo's young years drew to a close. They had been eventful ones. He had successfully completed his apprenticeship as a dealer, and had steadily risen to a stable position, which had made him financially independent of his parents. In terms of his personal life, however, his stay in The Hague had drawn heavily on his mental reserves. To use Rükert's words, it had made him realise, once and for all, that his youth was over. The dramatic events and his parents' exaggerated expectations had
turned him into a grave melancholy man, who knew his duties. He was, and remained, entirely loyal to his family, but he also felt constantly lonely, as he wrote in his first letter to Jo. His leaving for Paris was probably first and foremost a release: he could leave The Hague behind him and could, for the greater part, withdraw from the well meant but stifling attention of his parents.

In the French capital his career prospered. As a result of a reorganisation at Goupil's, he was already appointed manager of the Boulevard Monmartre gallery in January 1881. During the Parisian years his relationship with Vincent improved and deepened, certainly in the time that they lived together (1886-88). His income enabled him to assist his brother financially in his effort to build up a career as a painter. Together, and over a relatively short period of time, they compiled an extensive art collection, which was housed in Theo's apartment. Furthermore, Theo, partly inspired by Vincent, devoted himself to promoting a number of avant-garde artists like Degas, Gauguin, Monet and Pissarro. As he wrote to Jo in July 1887, in those years, art was for a long time ‘the only thing [...] I admired and lived for.’

fig. 11
Jacob Maris, The mill, The Hague, Museum Mesdag

87 Ibid: ‘Kunst [was] het eenige [...] waar ik voor voelde & voor leefde.’
fig. 1
Remains of a letter (verso of fig. 2), Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
The Van Gogh letters project: new findings and old

Leo Jansen

The research for the scholarly edition of the letters written by and to Vincent van Gogh has now been under way for over three years. The entire text of the Dutch correspondence has been studied, and much of the preparatory work has been done for the annotations. This will continue for some time before work starts on the French correspondence, partly because the Van Gogh Museum is soon to be closed for several months and the manuscripts housed elsewhere.

The four-volume Dutch edition published in 1990 is the most complete thus far; compared to the 1953 edition, which was translated into a great many languages, it incorporates numerous changes: new letters were added, dates revised and censored passages reinstated. The ongoing study of Van Gogh's work and letters throughout the world has prompted many suggestions for changes, and our research, too, has yielded fresh information.

But this does not necessarily mean that all the changes in our edition will actually be new. Aside from numerous letters, scores of other documents in Van Gogh's handwriting have been preserved. The most sizeable are the poetry albums and sheets of paper onto which he copied poems and prose passages for others: many of these have now been published. Some contain sentences resembling fragments of correspondence, such as (on a page containing an extract from St Augustine's Confessions and the text of 1 Cor. 13, the ode to love): 'I just received Pa's letter. Thank God. God make us brothers.' In addition to these sheets, there are others preserved as drawings which contain text that reveals they were originally part of a letter: for example, the text on the verso side of a pen and ink drawing of a girl's head († 1507a JH 1466). Similarly, a pen and ink drawing of a woman's head (fig. 2) was classified until recently as an independent sketch, but the text on the back shows that it was originally an illustration within a letter (fig. 1).

The text reads:

eel pleizier en /wou/?
id voor had -
ken zoo als ik 't voel -
e van Havermann b.v.
r me in - iets jongs en
 eh/?
 - niet dat vind wat

1 The project is a collaborative venture of the Van Gogh Museum and the Constantijn Huygens Institute for Text Editions and Intellectual History. I am indebted to Elly Cassee, Hans Luijten and Fieke Pabst for the assistance they gave me while I was preparing this article.


3 Ibid., p. 89. There is a comparable example on p. 91.


5 In The new complete Van Gogh: paintings, drawings, sketches, Amsterdam & Philadelphia 1996, p. 140, Jan Hulsker refers to it as ‘Probably a letter-sketch.’ This has now been definitively established. Hulsker is mistaken, however, in stating that the whereabouts of the sheet are unknown; it is in the Van Gogh Museum (d 390 V/1970).
grijpt - ik wou
edheid - genie
een vrouwenfiguur -
[orden/?] brengen -
ou de la bonté est l'a
e - geloof ik zoo⁶

⁶ The textual versions presented here are based on the diplomatic transcription. Adjustments to the text have been kept to a minimum. The following general rules apply: layout and spacing have been standardised; underlined text is italicised; uncertain readings are enclosed by the signs / and /?; missing accents in French have been added; mistakes have only been corrected if they would otherwise cause confusion; a limited number of full-stops and commas have been added. For a complete discussion of our notation methods, see Hans Luijten. “‘As it came into my pen’: a new edition of the correspondence of Vincent van Gogh,” *Van Gogh Museum Journal* (1996), pp. 88-101.
Strictly speaking, there is no reason to reject the approximate date previously assigned to the sheet, which was January-February 1885, but it is safer to allow for a somewhat wider margin of error. Sjaar van Heugten tentatively dates the sheet 1884-85.  

We do not know to whom this enigmatic relic was addressed. Aside from Theo, another possible recipient - given the finished state of the drawing - was Van Rappard: Van Gogh’s letters to this fellow artist include several references (all derogatory) to the Dutch painter Hendrik Johannes Haverman (1857-1928).  

Such fragments, however mutilated, cannot be omitted from an edition of the letters that aims to be complete. Like the greater and lesser findings discussed below, they not only supply new information but also generate new questions.

An order for paint

Earlier editions paid no attention to the way in which the texts of the letters developed. They do not mention when Van Gogh added words or passages at a later stage, where interesting sections were deleted, or where Van Gogh gave special emphasis to a word or phrase - by underlining it several times or using different lettering. The diplomatic copies we are preparing for all the letters will incorporate details of just this kind. Although the vast majority of them, it has to be said, are trivial corrections or errors, a deletion occasionally conceals something surprising.

Sometime around Saturday, 22 September 1883 - over a week after his arrival in Drenthe from The Hague - Van Gogh wrote his brother a long letter on a variety of subjects [391/326]. The text takes up two large sheets of paper (each one folded, producing a total of eight pages). Its last lines are sandwiched between five lines that have been deleted with thick penstrokes. The deletions prove to have been the beginning of another letter; Van Gogh crossed it out, turned the sheet around and

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8 Cf. letters 440/R43 and 513/R52.
used it for the second part of his letter to Theo. He was apparently unable or unwilling
to take a fresh sheet, and he clearly did his best to make it impossible for Theo to
read the deleted words (fig. 3). The deleted fragment (fig. 4), which was rather
difficult to decipher, reads as follows:

Mijnheer,

Het zou mij aangenaam wezen als f. 1.95
post-pakket van U te ontvangen 6 tubes
LAQUE DE GARANCE (rose/3 brûlée/3)
En 6 tubes Outremer GEWOON -.60
8 „ Indigo 1.80’

As we know relatively little about Van Gogh's use of materials in his early years,
it is all the more interesting that the fragment is an order for paint. The artist had left
The
fig. 3
Letter to Theo van Gogh, c. 22 September 1883 [391/326], Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
Hague for Drenthe with few materials, which he later regretted. On Saturday, 29 September he wrote to Theo: ‘Van morgen was het wederom beter weer & ben ik uitgegaan om toch te schilderen. Alleen het was niet mogelijk, 4 of 5 kleuren ontbraken me en ik ben toch zoo beroerd weer teruggekomen. - Ik heb spijt zonder voorraad mij zoo ver gewaagd te hebben’ [394/329].

He thus needed to have paint and brushes sent by one of his former suppliers in The Hague. Whether the above list refers to watercolour or oil paint has yet to be established. Van Gogh used both in Drenthe; however, considering the number of tubes, oil paint would appear the most likely. It is interesting that the list includes an order for indigo, as this colour was previously only recognised in his palette from June 1884 onwards - about nine months later.

This list is not, of course, a letter in the strict sense; at best it is an incomplete rough draft. Nor is it certain for which of his usual suppliers the note was intended: H.J. Furnée, a pharmacist and paint dealer on the Korte Poten, whose acquaintance Van Gogh had made through his son (a surveyor to whom he gave advice on painting), or Leurs in the Practijnsheek (later in the Molenstraat), who supplied many Hague artists with their materials at the time. Van Gogh could obtain batches of old paint from either of these firms at a 33% cash discount. This discount is not mentioned in the note, possibly because he wanted the paint delivered by mail and was hence unable to pay in cash.

It is not possible to ascertain if these deleted passages later led to a letter, but it is an established fact that Van Gogh ordered paint from Furnée while he was in Drenthe: in his letter to Theo of Thursday, 4 October he wrote: ‘ik had verf laten komen v. Furnee’ [395/330]. If there is any connection between this remark and the erased order, this would date the note some time before 4 October 1883. On the other hand,
it is not impossible that he was still purchasing from Leurs. It is true that he had cleared a debt with him on 29 September [394/329], but as late as 5 August 1885 he wrote from Nuenen to Furnée that he still had an old debt of f/25 outstanding to Leurs [524/419a].
An ‘enclosed’ letter

The manuscripts of letter 416/347, written to Theo in mid-December 1883, contain several points of interest, both in terms of content and material. In the 1990 version, the ‘complete’ letter consists of three parts: a sheet bearing the salutation and signature, unmistakably written during the domestic disputes of the early Nuenen period; a second sheet which begins ‘Beste broer’ ('Dear brother'), but is unsigned; and a sheet with neither salutation nor ending, but whose first sentence begins with the words: ‘Sedert ik inliggende brief schreef’ ('Since I wrote the enclosed letter'). This sheet, too, was clearly written in Nuenen, as it refers to Van Gogh's having been given the laundry room in his parents' home to make into a studio.

According to the 1990 edition, the second and third parts were ‘ingesloten’ ('enclosed') with the first. For completeness' sake it should be noted that Jo van Gogh-Bonger did not include either of them with the first part in her 1914 edition of the letters. We decided to remove the middle part from the letter on the basis of the following findings:

- The beginning of the third part refers to an ‘inliggende brief’ ('enclosed letter'), i.e. in the singular, which seems to contradict the suggestion made in the 1990 edition that there were two enclosed letters.
- The paper used for the middle part is squared, and thus different from that used in the other two parts.
- The content of the middle sheet shows little affinity with the Nuenen letters and all the more to the letters from Drenthe; the fragment does not contain any real indication that it was written in Nuenen.
- In the middle part Van Gogh explains his position vis-à-vis his father and H.G. Tersteeg. But while the latter seems to have played no role in the conflict in Nuenen, he did in the Drenthe letters, e.g. letter 405/339a, in which he is mentioned in the same breath as Father van Gogh. This letter, it may be added, was written on similar squared paper.
- The phrase ‘toen onlangs te 's Hage wij een beetje twistten’ ('when we quarrelled a little some time ago in The Hague') in the middle part is a reference to Theo's visit to his brother on 17 August that year. Assuming they were written in mid-December, the words ‘some time ago in The Hague’ would have been a curious way of describing a visit that had taken place in a completely different season, with the entire Drenthe period in between.
- At the end of the middle part there is still mention of the possibility that Theo might become a painter; his decision to continue as an art dealer, made at the end of November, had evidently not been taken by the time of this fragment.
- The same final passage includes an expression that Van Gogh frequently used while in Drenthe to encourage Theo to change careers: ‘foi de charbonnier.’
- Van Gogh here refers to a whole series of painters whose attitudes and views he respects, and whom he contrasts with his father: Millet, Corot, Daubigny, Breton, Herkomer, Boughton, Jules Dupré and Israëls. The same opposition, including most of the same names, occurs in letter 405/339a from Drenthe (the same list except for Boughton, and with the addition of the writers Michelet, Hugo, Zola and Balzac).
- The fragment begins with an apology for his clumsy way of expressing himself. This may also be compared with letter 405/339a, in which he describes himself as writing ‘in horten en stooten, ongeregd en ruw slechts’ (‘stumblingly, incoherently, roughly’).
- There was initially writing on the other side of the sheet (reversed), comparable to the paint order discussed above, with a clear salutation that was then deleted: ‘Van daag was het zooals tegenwoordig meestal, een triestig regendag - maar heerlijk mooi was het buiten juist daarom, en ik voor mij voelt mij juist door die trieste stemming getrokken om dan de dingen te gaan bekijken.’

Both these weather conditions and the overall mood are more in accordance with Drenthe, where Van Gogh experienced a long rainy spell in late September and early October.

The sheet therefore appears to belong to roughly the same period as letter 405/339a, which we have provisionally dated - at variance with the 1990 edition - on or around 28 November 1885. However, it also displays significant resemblances to letter 391/326 (c. 22 September), including:
- A reference to Hugo's 'le rayon noir' and 'le rayon blanc.'
- A reference to a visit paid by Theo in Nuenen, and the matters discussed on that occasion.

14 ‘Today was, as it usually is these days, a sombre rainy day - but for that very reason it was beautiful outside, and I myself feel drawn precisely by that sad mood to look at things.’
15 Based on the conclusions of Wout Dijk, ‘“Dark and dreary days”: dating Van Gogh's letters from Drenthe,’ Van Gogh Museum Journal (1996), pp. 103-07.
- A reference to the lack of support and understanding he had received from his parents after losing his job at Goupil's.
- A reference to the contrast between his father's 'onwetenheid' ('ignorance') and the 'wijsheid' ('wisdom') of a man such as Corot.

So the near-certainty that the composition of letter 416/347 has to be changed creates a fresh problem - that of determining where the middle fragment belongs. It cannot be ruled out (indeed, it is quite likely) that the similarity of subject-matter in both letters 405/339a and 391/326 will, after further research, make additional rearrangement(s) or redating(s) necessary.

**Lost letters: dependence on photographs**

There is a similar example of 'detachment' in a letter from Van Gogh to the painter Anthon van Rappard (1858-1892). The importance of being able to consult the original manuscripts is felt acutely in cases where we have only reproductions at our disposal. This, unfortunately, applies to all Van Gogh's letters to Van Rappard. Photographs were made of the manuscripts for the first edition of this correspondence (an English translation published in 1936), and for the present these are all we have. We have several prints of some of the letters, but the photographs are of poor quality. The original letters are now in the hands of one or more unknown collectors, as are the 21 letters to Emile Bernard, and more than a dozen letters to other people.

There are several curious elements in the letter to Van Rappard written in The Hague around mid-June 1883 [356/R37]: while most of the letter indisputably deals with Hague matters - such as a meeting with the painter Herman Johannes van der Weele, who lived there; a model's cloak of the type worn by women in Scheveningen; drawings of peat-diggers and a sandpit - it also discusses drawings of 'wintertuintjes' ('little winter gardens') which Van Gogh was working on - a strange subject for June. The gardens were raised again the following spring, when Van Gogh was living and working in Nuenen.16 Furthermore, two of the people he mentions, De Louw and Renesse, actually lived in Nuenen.

This is an anomalous jumble to come across within a single letter, and has been the subject of debate ever since the first publication regarding the date, which is important as it largely determines the chronology of the drawings and paintings mentioned. On the basis of its content, Roland Dorn has proposed that the letter as published be regarded as a mistaken combination of two parts: one written in Nuenen and the other in The Hague.17 The passages that seem not to belong to The Hague period are all found on a sheet that has been inserted between two others; at least this much can still be determined from the photographs. On closer inspection it also appears that the black border around the manuscript in the photograph is different from that around the other two sheets. This means that the photographs were taken

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16 E.g. in the Van Rappard letters 438/R44 and 439/R42.

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in different ways, either at different times or under different conditions. Moreover, on one of the two prints of the single sheet we have, we find the word ‘translate’ (in English), obviously written when the English edition was being prepared. It is a stroke of luck that we have this note, as it falls outside the image in the other photograph and this could just as easily have been the case in both. The word ‘translate’ indicates that the sheet once had an independent status; alternatively, it could have been the first page of a letter, as such a comment would have been superfluous on subsequent sheets of the same document. In short, this sheet, which once lay in the pile of Van Rappard letters, was inserted without much thought in the middle of a letter from a different period, sparking a debate among Van Gogh scholars that would last for decades.

Once again, this raises the question of where the sheet actually belongs. There is, however, little chance of answering this question in a satisfactory way. In the forthcoming edition it will probably be classified as an incomplete letter from the Nuenen period and given an uncertain date. Only an ‘autopsy’ of the originals could shed more light on the matter.

Equally significant is the fact that a great many of the above-mentioned letters to Emile Bernard are known only from the 1893 Mercure de France series of articles and the 1911 Vollard edition of the Lettres de Vincent van Gogh à Emile Bernard; we do have a few photographs of some of these letters, but they are complete only in three cases. It would be invaluable for us to be able to consult the originals.

**Two previously unknown letters to Vincent Van Gogh**

In the period preceding the opening of the Van Gogh Museum in 1973, the collection was in the care of Theo's
son, the engineer V.W. van Gogh. He was sometimes alerted of the existence of letters in private collections and occasionally, although certainly not always, he was asked if he wanted to acquire them. In the archives of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, two copies of letters to Vincent made by V.W van Gogh have been found. In the absence of the originals, these copies must serve as source material for our edition. We have no idea when or where they were made, nor who the owner was or is. Furthermore, we are dependent on the accuracy of the copyist. An example of a letter passed down in this indirect fashion is letter 331/-, which was first published in 1990. Since then it has become clear that the letter was first copied by hand and then typed out, causing it to be dated completely inaccurately and giving rise to the suggestion that another letter by Van Gogh must have been lost.

The first new note we now know thanks to V.W. van Gogh was from Joseph Ginoux, the proprietor of the Café de la Gare in Arles and a friend of Van Gogh's. It reached the painter at the psychiatric institution St Paul-de-Mausole in Saint-Rémy, where he had committed himself on 8 May 1889 following another breakdown:

‘Café de la gare
Joseph Ginoux
Arles s/Rhone.
Arles, le 31 Mai 1889,
Cher Monsieur Vincent,
Nous avons été très heureux d'apprendre que vous vous portiez bien et que l'air de St. Rémy vous était favorable. Nous comprenons que vous trouviez bien et que les environs de votre nouvelle résidence qui n'était que provisoire, vous trouveriez des distractions et des sujets pour votre art. J'ai fait faire un joli cadre comme nous en étions convenu, en noyer et irréprochable. Je l'ai remis à M. L'économe.
J'ai donné de vos nouvelles à tous ceux qui vous connaissent et tout le monde a été enchanté, d'ap prendre que votre santé était bonne et nous es périons que sous peu nous aurions le plaisir de vous voir et en attendant je vous prie d'agréer bien, cher Monsieur, de moi et de Madame Ginoux, l'assurance de nos meilleurs sentiments.
Jh. Ginoux.’

18 I am indebted to Han Veenenbos of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation for her discovery of these copies.
19 See Luijten, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 88-101; the subject is discussed on p. 96.
20 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation. Textual adjustments: ‘convenu’ was ‘couvenu’ in the copy; ‘remis’ was ‘renvis’; ‘sous peu’ was ‘vous peu.’ ‘Arles, 31 May 1889, Dear M. Vincent, We were extremely pleased to learn that you are doing well and that the air of Saint-Rémy has done you good. We understand that you are making good progress and that the surroundings of your new residence, which is only temporary, will distract you and provide subjects for your work. I have had a fine frame made as we had agreed, in walnut and quite impeccable. I delivered it to your landlord. I have told your news to everyone who knows you, and everyone was glad to hear that you are in good health, and we hope soon to have the pleasure of seeing you, and in anticipation thereof I would ask you, dear Monsieur, to accept the assurances of our warmest feelings from Madame Ginoux and myself.’
This kind-hearted letter is not only characteristic of Ginoux's willingness to help, but also reveals that Van Gogh had instructed him to frame a certain painting in walnut. This was probably the piece about which he wrote to Theo in letter 770/589 (2 May 1889): ‘j'ai en train une allée de maronniers à fleurs roses avec un petit cérisier en fleur et une plante de glycine et le sentier du parc, tacheté de soleil et d'ombre. Cela fera pendant au jardin qui est dans le cadre en noyer.’ Van Gogh scholars are still divided about the identity of the ‘garden which is in the walnut frame,’ but the new question raised by Ginoux's note (which painting did he have framed for Van Gogh?) appears to be answered by the above description, although Ginoux says nothing about the scene depicted. It is Red chestnuts in the public garden at Arles (fig. 5).

21 ‘I am doing an avenue of pink flowering chestnuts and a little cherry tree in flower and a wisteria plant and a path in the park splashed with light and shade. This will make a pendant to the garden which is in the walnut frame.’


fig. 5
Vincent van Gogh, *Red chestnuts in the public garden at Arles (F 517 JH 1689)*, private collection
Yet another note to Van Gogh reached us initially only through a transcription made by V.W. van Gogh, although now the original has also been found: a postcard from the book dealer Lamblot in Arles, addressed to ‘M. Vincent, chez Mr. le Docteur Peyron, St. Rémy, B[ouch]e d[u] R[hône].’

‘Arles, le 16 juillet 1889
Monsieur,
J'ai demandé à Paris le livre que vous m'avez commandé et on m'a répondu qu'ils étaient épuisés. Si vous voulez un autre valance, veuillez m'en donner le titre; et je vous l'expédierai aussitôt; si non je vous rembourserai votre argent à votre prochaine visite chez moi.
Recevez, Monsieur, nos salutations,
H. Lamblot
successeur A. Jauffret’

This text is that of the original; that of the typed copy by V.W. van Gogh, however, was rather different. It was signed ‘H. Gemtlat successeeur A. Jauffre.’ There was no record in the Arles municipal archives of anyone by these names. It appears, though, that there was a bookshop called ‘Lamblot, Jauffret,’ located at 12, Rue de la Poissonnerie, Arles, in the period concerned. The surname Jauffret belonged to a ‘demoiselle,’ and a M. Lamblot was registered at the same address. One year later, the lady's name was also Lamblot, so that it seems that she married the man who took over the shop (or perhaps it would be more correct, historically speaking, to say that Lamblot took over the shop by marrying the owner). On the basis of this information, we concluded that the readings ‘Gemtlat’ and ‘Jauffre’ must have been mistaken, and the extremely recent, accidental discovery of the original (during the writing of this article!) confirmed our hypothesis. This is a fresh reminder of the necessity to proceed with caution whenever originals are not available.

V.W. van Gogh's copy of the short text printed above contained yet another mistake: it includes the words ‘les livres que vous m'avez commandé,’ but in fact Van Gogh had only ordered one book. The order referred to must have been made on Sunday, 7 July 1889, when Van Gogh visited Arles under the supervision of a staff member from the clinic in Saint-Rémy. We are unlikely ever to discover what book it was that he ordered.

The purpose of the new edition is to enable Van Gogh scholars to make the best possible use of the letters. With a view to this primary objective, we will aim to answer the countless questions raised by the letters as adequately as possible, without

24 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, b 3154 V/1966: ‘Arles, 16 July 1889. Sir, I made enquiries in Paris after the book you ordered from me and was informed that it was out of print. Should you have an alternative wish, be so good as to give me the title, and I shall send it to you forthwith. If not, I shall return your money when next you visit me. Please accept, Sir, our cordial greetings, H. Lamblot successor to A. Jauffret.’

25 I would like to thank Arlette Playoust, Directeur des Archives départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, for supplying me with this information.

glossing over any areas of uncertainty. The above account demonstrates that this is not always satisfactory. Solutions cause problems: ‘He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.’ But that is nothing new.
fig. 1
Vincent van Gogh, *Plaster statuette of a horse*, spring 1886 (F216c JH 1082), Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
Van Gogh's plaster models examined and restored
Berthold Köster and Erik Tjebbes

The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam owns seven plaster figures, at least three of which were used by Van Gogh as models for his paintings. It is only recently that these models have been exhibited at the museum. One reason for the previous lack of interest was that some of them were in very poor condition. In the wake of the great popularity of the exhibitions marking the centenary of the painter's death, however, the question arose as to whether they, too, should not be put on display. The damaged figures have now been reconstructed and restored by the authors. Particularly interesting are the fragments of the horse and the kneeling man.

Van Gogh at Cormon's studio

Despite his original intention to join an art school as soon as possible after arriving in Paris, it was probably only some weeks later that Van Gogh actually entered a studio. As he wrote to the Belgian painter Horace Livens, he did not ‘have enough money for models’ [572/459a]; the only solution was to go to the atelier of an established artist, where he would be able to make drawings from the nude for a relatively small fee, and obtain a master's opinion of his attempts.¹ It was probably in the spring of 1886 that he enrolled at the private art school of Fernand-Anne Piestre, also known as Cormon, whose studio on the Boulevard de Clichy was already known to him from various Dutch painters back home in the Netherlands. How long he actually worked there is not known.² In the letter to Livens, probably from the late summer of 1886, Van Gogh stated: ‘I was in Cormon's studio for three or four months, but I did not find it as useful as I had expected. It may be my fault, however. Anyway, I left there, too, as I left Antwerp, and since then I have worked alone, and fancy that I feel my own self more.’³

Cormon was a history painter and he ‘would certainly [have been] able to teach Van Gogh how to work in a conventional, craftsmanlike manner and still attract attention.’⁴ On account of his age, his appearance and his attitude towards studio painting, however, Van Gogh was an outsider even to his fellow pupils. His only close contacts were with Louis Anquetin, Emile Bernard and the master-class pupil Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. He frequently discussed art theory with them - an activity that often seemed more important to him than painting after plaster casts. Nonetheless, some of these paintings have survived: a female torso on an Attic base, of which Van

1 See David Sweetman, Vincent van Gogh, 1853-1890, Düsseldorf 1990, p. 240.
2 As Van Gogh's time in Paris is not fully documented, his entry into Cormon's studio has been the subject of much debate; see Mathias Arnold, Vincent van Gogh: Biographie, Munich 1993, pp. 428-29.
3 ‘Ik ben drie of vier maanden naar het atelier van Cormon geweest, maar ik vond dat niet zo nuttig als ik had gedacht. Maar het zou ook aan mij kunnen liggen. In ieder geval ben ik daar ook weggegaan, net zoals ik uit Antwerp weggegaan ben, en sindsdien wek ik alleen en heb ik het idee dat ik meer mezelf ben.’ See also the critical commentary in Arnold, op. cit. (note 2), p. 440.
Gogh painted five different versions; a female torso, with its right leg resting on a pedestal curved in the fashion of a cornice; the torso of an athlete; a horse (fig. 1); and a kneeling man (fig. 2). After leaving Cormon's, plaster models seem to have ceased to be a relevant topic for him; only a painting of a female torso on a fabric-covered surface, from the winter of 1887-88, has survived (fig. 3).

5 F 216a JH 1054; F 216g JH 1055; F 216b JH 1060; F 216h JH 1058; F 216j JH 1059. These works and the others mentioned below are reproduced in colour in Walter and Metzger, op. cit. (note 4), pp. 145-49, 151 and 292.
6 F 216d JH 1071 and F 216i JH 1072.
7 F 216e JH 1078.
8 F 216c JH 1082.
9 F 216f JH 1076.
10 F 216 JH 1348.
fig. 2
*Plaster statuette of a kneeling man*, spring 1886 (F 216F JH 1076), Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

fig. 3
*Plaster statuette of a female torso, seen from the front*, winter 1887-88 (F 216 JH 1348), Tokyo, private collection

figs. 4-5
Plaster model of the horse before and after restoration

The plaster horse and the kneeling man
Van Gogh painted after the plaster horse in the spring of 1886 in oil on cardboard, mounted on plywood (fig. 1). The painting is very small: a mere 33 x 41 cm.\(^{11} \) The trotting horse depicted in the painting is similar in size to the original model (about 25 cm high and 30 cm wide).

Prior to its restoration, the plaster model was in very poor condition (figs. 4 and 5). All four legs were badly damaged and partly missing, the base was broken in the middle, and the tail and left ear had vanished. The outlines of the legs could be roughly surmised from the shape of the reinforcement wires. Reconstruction was complicated, as there was no completely authentic model.\(^ {12} \) Van Gogh's painting shows part of the shape of the legs and musculature. However, his outlines in the lower leg area are very imprecise and were of little use in the restoration. The right foreleg strides out further in the model than in the painting. The left rear leg is more acutely angled in the painted work, and the right rear hock is more pointed than in the plaster model. It was finally possible to determine what shape the reconstruction should take on the basis of the variations between the final painting and its underlying preliminary sketch. The sketch shows a broad, bushy tail, which Van Gogh subsequently corrected. The model still had the original front right hoof, quite flat and out of proportion. In the painting it has been enlarged in umber, with the additional area appearing as part of the hoof. In contrast to the other three hooves, here the artist has evidently made an addition of his own to the model. The fact that the wire reinforcement of the left rear leg extends into the base indicates that there must have been some object under the raised hoof which does not appear in the painting. There was a fracture in the base underneath the hoof. Following the restoration, the model was retouched.

The Van Gogh Museum owns another plaster model after which Van Gogh painted during his time in Cormon's studio (fig. 2). This is the model of a muscular nude man, squatting on a low, polygonal seat (figs. 6 and 7).

\(^{11} \) Relatively small paintings were in any case typical of Van Gogh, as he often had to ration his paper and painting supplies. In a considerable number of his pictures the long side is less than 50 cm.

\(^{12} \) Before the model was restored in the summer of 1992, the authors enquired whether the Van Gogh Museum had any additional information about the horse. They were told that there were no clues as to either the existence of similar models or the origin of this one. The missing parts, particularly the tail, were reconstructed on the basis of the pictorial interpretation in Van Gogh's painting. It was only while researching this article that the authors came across additional casts, some of whose protruding parts, such as the right foreleg and the tail, had also been reconstructed.
This cast was not as badly damaged as the horse; only the left arm was missing. Reconstruction was relatively simple, thanks to a completely identical plaster model acquired by the museum. The only difference between this model and the one from which Van Gogh painted is that it was covered with a brownish coat of paint. The existence of this identical cast made it an easy matter to reconstruct the missing arm.

The female torso

The third figure used by Van Gogh was a plaster female torso, about 60 cm high (figs. 8 and 9). He is thought to have painted the picture after it (fig. 3) in the winter of 1887-88. It is 73 x 54 cm in size, which is relatively large for a Van Gogh painting. The model is viewed from above, and the artist has painted the torso with great precision. The shadow cast by the light from the left emphasises the curves of the body. The remains of curly hair falling over the shoulders are more plastic in the painting than in the cast. In contrast to Van Gogh's other paintings after plaster models, the figure's contours are clearly defined; only the cushion is a little unclear. The preliminary sketches, which still show through in the paintings of the horse and the athlete, are no longer visible here. The background changes from a vigorous yellow at the bottom of the picture to a lighter yellow in the middle, and then to an
increasingly blue colour towards the top. To the right of the figure there is a smooth blending of colour.

Before the restoration, the cushion was completely broken off below the right thigh, and a small part of the
hair on the right collar-bone was also missing. The absence of the right-hand part of the cushion meant that the torso could no longer stand upright. The depiction of the folds in Van Gogh's painting, however, made it possible to achieve an almost completely authentic reconstruction. The missing piece of the cushion was recreated in plaster, and the torso can now once again stand erect.

Other casts

In addition to the three plaster figures Van Gogh used as models for his paintings, the Van Gogh Museum owns several others after which no paintings appear to exist. All of these casts were in need of some attention. The death mask of Dante (fig. 10), for example, originally painted but covered with a greyish-brown layer of dirt, needed to be cleaned. There was also some minor flaking and scratching all over the surface. The model itself, however, was undamaged, and did not require any reconstruction or reinforcement. The colour of the headgear could eventually be identified as a dark reddish-brown. A small paper label indicating the name of the gallery from which the cast was purchased is still glued to the inside of the mask. It reads: ‘Articles de Peinture - L. Latquiche - 34, r. de Lafayette.’ This gives a clue to the mask's origin, but does not tell us whether either Vincent or Theo van Gogh acquired it themselves, or whether Vincent ever painted from it.
In view of its relatively good condition, the mask was simply cleaned mechanically, using fine brushes and a soft eraser so as not to damage the original surface. Badly soiled parts such as the eyes, nose and mouth were also cleaned with a pH-neutral soap. After cleaning, the mask was coated with a protective varnish to prevent further dirtying.

The Van Gogh Museum also owns a cast of a young woman's face with closed eyes (fig. 11), probably also a death mask. This piece was originally a greyish-brown colour. Before restoration there was a crack on the left-hand side of the face, running from the left ear across the cheek to the corner of the mouth and up to the cheek-bone. The surface displayed flaking and fine cracks. The mask was covered with a thin layer of dirt that concealed most of this surface damage. This indicates that the damage itself was probably older. Due to the crack across the left cheek, the mask was in danger of fracturing; synthetic resin and reinforcement strips were thus applied to the back to strengthen it. On the surface, however, the crack
was left untreated. Following this reinforcement the mask was cleaned, retouched, and coated with a protective layer of varnish.

There is likewise no evidence that Van Gogh ever painted after the statue of a nude young man - a *Slave* after Michelangelo - also in the collection (figs. 12 and 13). Technically, this figure was in good condition. A glued join can be seen above the bent left knee. The base has been restored under the ball of the foot. The figure, which was originally painted white, was covered with a thin layer of dirt and had become very grey. Like the other casts, it was mechanically cleaned and then retouched.

The seventh model to undergo restoration was the *Bust of a man* (fig. 14). This model was badly damaged. The left shoulder, the pedestal, and the mount were all missing. The shoulder was recreated in plaster, as were missing
parts of the moustache. The neck has a cylindrical depression into which a mounting rod can be inserted, and a replacement rod was made out of high-grade steel. To ensure firm anchorage, a plaster wedge was fitted to the upper end of the steel rod, completely filling the hole in the neck and so providing an ideal mount. The steel rod was glued into the pedestal, which is made of polished natural stone. The surface, which was reasonably clean, had been coated with a layer of yellowish-green paint. As with the other casts, it was mechanically cleaned. Finally, the reconstructed parts were colour-matched to the original.

**Further analyses**

Paint analysis was carried out on three of the models: the horse, the female torso, and the statuette of the young man. The purpose was to determine whether white
lead had been applied to all the casts, and which pigments were present in the dab of green paint on the horse's left flank. It was found that white lead had indeed been used as a base substance, together with a number of adjuvants. The green paint turned out to consist of cadmium yellow, chrome yellow, zinc yellow and viridian.

**Van Gogh and the classical tradition**

As noted above, there are no paintings in Van Gogh's oeuvre after the death masks of Dante and the young woman, the Michaelangelo statuette, or the bust of the moustachioed man. It is no longer possible to tell whether the casts were already in the Van Gogh brothers' possession in Vincent and Theo's day, or whether they were purchased later. As Vincent often gave away, destroyed or painted over his pictures, there is also no way of knowing whether or not he ever painted after them.

In his letters, Van Gogh rarely mentioned the fact that he had painted after classical models. He wrote to Theo from Antwerp, for example: ‘For speaking of Corman,
In letter 563/452 he told Theo that he had not yet solved the problem of how to draw from the antique, but that he was developing a better feel for it and would keep up his efforts. In the same letter he refers to the urgent need to produce studies after classical models once he is in Paris. At the end of letter 566/455 he mentions that he is currently working on a female torso, and reiterates his plan to move to Paris: ‘So there is no choice; besides, what need is there to choose? For what is most pressing must come first, and that is the period of drawing from the nude and the works of antiquity.’

His acquaintances described him painting from plaster figures in the classical style. Emile Bernard recalled

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13 ‘Want van Corman gesproken, il stel mij voor, hij me ongeveer ‘t zelfde zou zeggen wat Verlat zegt, dat ik naakt of antiek moet tekenen een jaartje, juist omdat ik altijd naar ‘t leven heb getekend.’

14 ‘Er is dus geen keus - trouwens wat ware er voor keus nodig, want wat het meest presseert, moet het eerst worden afgedaan, en dat is die tijd naakt en antiek tekenen.’

later: ‘I see Vincent again at Cormon's, in the afternoon, when - without its students - the studio became a kind of cell for him. Standing in front of an ancient plaster cast, he copies the beautiful shapes with the patience of an angel. He wants to master these contours, these dimensions, these reliefs. He corrects his work, starts again with enthusiasm, and ends up making holes in his paper and destroying it with his erasures. Faced with this Latin marvel, which resists him to the end, in his own Dutch way he does not doubt for a minute that he will succeed in conquering it; but he was to find his way much better and sooner in the freer fantasy and light lyricism of impressionism than in this calm perfection, revealed to serener men and civilisations closer to nature and more adapted to thought.’

While the pictures Van Gogh painted after plaster casts are not necessarily among his most important, they do reflect the phase that marks the beginning of the work which was later to make him famous. As the extracts from his letters indicate, his move to Paris was preceded by a period in which he showed great interest in drawing after classical models. Cormon's studio played a decisive role in this process, even while Van Gogh was still in Antwerp, and made it easier for him to leave. It is not known why the artist later also left Cormon's studio. Probably during the summer months he simply preferred painting out of doors to sitting in a studio making studies of casts.

fig. 14
The Bust of a man after restoration

15 Lettres de Vincent van Gogh à Emile Bernard, ed. Ambroise Vollard, Paris 1911, pp. 10-11: ‘Je le revois chez Cormon, l'après-midi, alors que l'atelier vide d'élèves lui devenait une sorte de cellule; assis devant une antique en plâtre, il copie les belles formes avec un patience angélique. Il veut s'emparer de ces contours, de ces masses, de ces reliefs. Il se corrige, recommence avec passion, efface, et finalement trouve sa feuille de papier à force de la frotter avec une gomme. C'est qu'il ne se doute pas, devant cette merveille latine, que tout s'oppose, dans sa nature de Hollandais, à la conquête qu'il veut faire; et il trouvera bien mieux et plus tôt sa route dans les impressionnistes à la libre fantaisie, au lyricisme facile, que dans cette calme perfection révélée à des hommes sereins, en des civilisations proches de la nature et de la pensée.’
[The Collection in Context]

fig. 1
Théodule Ribot, *Still life with eggs*, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum
Théodule Ribot's *Still life with eggs* and the practice of still-life painting in the late 19th century

*Gabriel P. Weisberg*

The recent addition of Théodule Ribot's *Still life with eggs* (fig. 1) to the permanent collection of the Van Gogh Museum raises issues relevant to the significance of still-life painting in the latter half of the 19th century in general, and to Ribot's career in particular.1 This canvas demonstrates that still-life painting had many adherents, and that realists like Ribot (1823-1891) continued to produce pieces in this genre even while working on contemporary themes or executing portraits of members of their immediate entourage. *Still life with eggs*, which presents both objects and an arrangement of shapes frequently explored by Ribot, suggests that the painter grew attached to certain forms. These forms had a permanent place in the artist's environment, and seem to have provided him with a sense of stability in a life frequently troubled by ill health and economic hardship. As we will argue here, because they reveal the independent spirit of an artist determined to paint the things he treasured in his own way, Ribot's still lifes - and this painting in particular - are a means (although not the only one) of assessing his contribution to 19th-century painting as a whole. The Van Gogh Museum painting, a composition Ribot repeated several times (with some variations), is a telling introduction not only to his accomplishments in the field of still-life painting, but also to the artistic influences that shaped his career, including the work of certain Spanish artists dominant in his other chosen subjects, such as portraits or genre scenes.

Given Ribot's sense of independence and the often dour tone of his painting, it is interesting to note that when a large retrospective of his work was held at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in May 1892 - six months after his death - many members of the artistic and intellectual elite of the day expressed a great outpouring of affection and support for his art.2 Although Ribot had long remained aloof from artistic groups, choosing instead to live in the small village of Colombes outside Paris, his numerous friends within the art establishment and progressive circles remained loyal to him and his intensely personal work. They were frequently in contact with him, and they added his paintings to their own collections.3 Some, including art critics Paul Mantz,

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1 The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the Wildenstein Institute in making available many documents on Ribot. This information is to be integrated into other materials amassed over the last twenty-five years in preparation for a catalogue raisonné on Ribot. On the *Still life with eggs* see also pp. 120-21 of this volume of the *Van Gogh Museum Journal*.


3 Since Ribot was a very private person, even reading his letters does not always help our understanding of his ideas. Those letters so far located often contain just a few sentences on practical issues and shed little light on the inner workings of the artist's mind. For some of these letters see the ‘Dossier Ribot’ in the Musée Rodin or the material at the Institut Néerlandais in Paris. Descendants of the Ribot family disappeared in the early 20th century, and the village of Colombes has been almost entirely destroyed by modern urbanisation, making it difficult to trace any remaining family members. On the interest in Colombes in the 1930s see exhib. cat. *Exposition rétrospective. Th. Ribot, peintre et aquafortiste, organisée à Colombes*, Colombes (Hôtel de Ville) 1934. The works on view were borrowed from Bernheim Jeune et Cie (a primary promoter of Ribot's work), the Louvre, the Petit Palais and the Musée Rodin, among others. For a more recent exhibition held in Colombes see.
Raoul Sertat and Louis de Fourcaud, wrote about his work in their Salon reviews and in exhibition catalogues published while the artist was alive or shortly after his death.  

4 On Fourcaud and Ribot see exhib. cat. *Exposition T. Ribot: catalogue raisonné des oeuvres exposées*, Paris (Galerie Bernheim Jeune) 1887, for which he wrote the preface. See also idem, *Th. Ribot: sa vie et ses œuvres*, Paris 1885.
Ribot's staunch artistic independence was already recognised during his lifetime. Indeed, in 1884 several of his closest friends and colleagues held a banquet in his honour, where they paid homage to just this aspect of his career and personality. While this fierce autonomy and refusal to belong to any artistic group or clique was quite admirable at the time, it has not served Ribot well in the century following his death. His remarkable ability to keep his personal life completely private, and to remain distant from contemporary artistic politics - to say nothing of the highly unusual nature of his paintings - have made it extremely difficult to appreciate his work or to publish a serious, comprehensive scholarly study of his life, imagery and significance. Few in 1892 could foresee how these issues would harm the artist's reputation in later years. Those who organised the retrospective did so in order to celebrate the artist's achievements and to demonstrate that his work was neither alien nor undervalued.

Among those who attested to the importance of Ribot's work in 1892 were Puvis de Chavannes, who served as president of the honorary committee, as well as the writer Roger Marx, then Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts, and Arsène Alexandre, an eminent critic for Le Figaro, who were vice president and secretary, respectively. They were joined by Eugène Carrière, Albert Besnard, Henri Fantin-Latour, Norbert Goeneutte, Jean-François Raffaëlli, Henri Rouart, Antoine Vollon, Alfred Roll and Auguste Rodin, among others, in expressing reverence for their dead colleague. The fact that many of these artists also supported the recently founded Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts creates the impression that the more progressive painters of the day solidly endorsed Ribot's efforts. With such a wide range of artists involved in the show's organisation (although it should be noted that the impressionists were absent), it becomes clear that Ribot was a beloved painter whose work was both admired and collected.

The extensive essay in the exhibition catalogue was written by Raoul Sertat. Its outline of the artist's life has long served as one of the primary sources of information on Ribot's career. Although the essay reveals the artist's sufferings and defines the

5 On the 1884 banquet see Th. Ribot, cit. (note 4), pp. 1-3. Fourcaud noted that Ribot was awarded a medal of honour for his dedication.

6 Most of Ribot's works are either scattered throughout museums and private collections, or have disappeared entirely. A number of his most impressive paintings, known through engravings or old photographs, have still to be located. Scholarly examinations have appeared in catalogues prepared by dealers, exhibition publications on larger thematic issues, or in small museum journals. For a relatively recent discussion of Ribot's place in the 19th century see exhib. cat. The realist tradition: French painting and drawing, 1830-1900, Cleveland (Cleveland Museum of Art) 1980; Gabriel P. Weisberg, ‘In search of state patronage: the French realists and the Second Empire, 1851-1871,’ in Art, the ape of nature: studies in honor of H.W. Janson, New York 1981, pp. 585-606; idem, ‘Théodule Ribot: popular imagery and the little milkmaid,’ Bulletin of The Cleveland Museum of Art 63 (1976), pp. 253-63; and idem, ‘Théodule Ribot’s peasant: a studio study piece,’ Register of the Spencer Museum of Art 6 (1993-94), no. 10, pp. 1-10.

7 According to Exposition Th. Ribot, cit. (note 2), other members of the honorary committee included Mantz and Fourcaud, who agreed with Edmond de Goncourt and other writers that Ribot's type of realism (or naturalism) had gained a broad following.

8 Sertat was the principal chronicler of Ribot's life, although other essays did appear later. See Raoul Sertat, ‘Théodule Ribot,’ Revue Populaire des Beaux-Arts 7 (1899), pp. 97-102, and idem, ‘Théodule Ribot,’ Revue Encyclopédique 40 (1892), pp. 1111-12. The latter, an
perimeters of his work, which ranged from genre scenes of cooks to large-scale religious compositions such as the *Saint Sebastian* of 1865 (Paris, Musée du Louvre), its analysis was largely influenced by Sertat's personal relationship with the painter. He admired the strength of the artist's work, the power of his black paintings - whose somber sincerity became one of the defining characteristics of his oeuvre - and his ability to express human suffering in the tenaciously observed portraits of friends and family members. Sertat considered these paintings to be the work of a ‘tragic poet.’ Strangely, however, he made no mention of Ribot's interest in still life. In fact, this important category was sorely under-represented in the 1892 retrospective. This was not unusual, given the disdain with which some critics still regarded the genre. At the same time, this omission sheds light on the way the painter worked, his ties with other family members, and the position of still-life painting in the 19th century. Also confusing the issue of the place and importance of still life in the artist's oeuvre are the works of his extremely useful publication, was frequently consulted by those in search of information on contemporary celebrities.
children, Germain and Louise, both of whom were talented still-life painters in their own right.

**Ribot and still-life painting**

The artist's keen interest in still life was known throughout his career, yet out of the more than 130 works on display only four such compositions appeared in the 1892 exhibition. One of the works shown was *The stoneware pot* (present location unknown), then in the collection of Roger Marx. A discriminating and admired collector, Marx did not hesitate to acquire works that represented a new direction or theme in an artist's output. Another exhibited still life, the Van Gogh Museum's *Still life with eggs* (fig. 1), then belonging to a Dutch or German collector named Steken, indicates the major interest Ribot had in this genre.

Even though he did not publicly exhibit his still lifes until the mid-1860s, Ribot's concern for this theme must be seen against the background of the broader interest in still-life painting that emerged in the 1850s as part of the realist movement. Through still lifes, painters found they could emphasise visual perception and explore humble, personal themes. Some realists, including Ribot's friends François Bonvin and Antoine Vollon, sold their still lifes to collector-connoisseurs of limited means. Others eagerly produced expensive compositions filled with flowers and elegant, fashionable ceramics. Given the immense popularity of such works during the Third Republic, one critic's observation that still-life painters multiplied like rodents seems to be true. On the other hand, Ribot and other artists who scrupulously observed

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9 The exact number of Ribot's still lifes is difficult to determine, as he may have made second versions of certain ones. The author's Ribot archive now contains references to more than 25 still lifes attributable to the artist, although several are ascribed with caution.

10 *See Exposition Th. Ribot*, cit. (note 2), no. 113.

11 Ibid., no. 64. The painting was acquired by the Van Gogh Museum in 1997 through the English dealer Sir Jack Baer, working through Hazlitt and Company in London. Like Baer, Hazlitt and Company has long maintained a strong interest in Ribot's works. For the past 30 years, the firm has been recognised as a leader in the promotion of Ribot's art.

12 No information has been found on either Steken or his collection, although we do know that Ribot's works were widely appreciated in Holland (and occasionally in Germany) in the late 19th century.

13 One of the earliest references to the public exhibition of a Ribot still life was found in the archives of André Watteau, a talented dealer in Paris in the 1970s. (The archive is now in the possession of Wildenstein Institute and is currently on loan to the author.) Watteau traced a Ribot still life to an exhibition held at the Société des Amis des Arts in Rouen in 1862. At one time Watteau had announced that he was preparing a catalogue raisonné of Ribot's work, but this publication was never completed.


15 On Bonvin see *Gabriel P. Weisberg, Bonvin*, Paris 1979. The number of rediscovered still lifes by Bonvin keeps growing. In recent years several have appeared on the art market, thus reaffirming the genre as a significant one for yet another realist. Vollon's support of the 1892 Ribot retrospective demonstrates that Ribot remained close to his colleagues for a long period of time.

16 This well-known statement was made by Castagnary in the 1860s and was reiterated by John McCourbey in his classic study of still-life imagery, *Studies in French still life painting.*
their surroundings had difficulty securing a clientele interested in more than depictions of pleasant objects and tasteful decor. Just as he refused to compromise in his studies of various individuals, neither did Ribot falter from his still lifes. His studies of rough earthenware ceramics, suggesting a certain sympathy towards the lower classes, or his use of objects appropriate to simple peasant meals, such as eggs in a ceramic container, were difficult to promote. Those few works that were sold went to Marx and other close friends, or to collectors with a discerning eye for structure and unusual aesthetic qualities.

Despite being widely practised by many artists, still-life painting was not highly placed in the artistic pantheon. Even in the late 19th century it met with considerable resistance, being thought by members of the Académie and teachers at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts to be unimaginative and unworthy of an artist's efforts. With this attitude still lingering, compounded by the fact that few of Ribot's still lifes can be considered beautiful in any conventional sense, it is not surprising that almost none were included in the 1892 retrospective. Furthermore, it would scarcely have bolstered Ribot's reputation to have been remembered only as a painter of earthenware jugs and coarsely depicted slabs of meat. The artist kept a large number of his still lifes - a whole series was found in his studio after his death - and only his family and closest friends were ever aware of these intensely personal

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*For a discussion of the vicissitudes of still-life painting see McCourbey, op. cit. (note 16).*
works. There are, however, still other reasons why Ribot's still lifes were a delicate issue in 1892.

The Veuve Ribot sale (1896)

Between 1892 and the Veuve Ribot sale of May 1896, the Ribot family's financial situation deteriorated considerably. Théodule's son Clement-Théodule Ribot (known as Germain; born 1845), who was also a painter, died in Argenteuil in 1893, further complicating matters and reinforcing the belief that the Ribots were plagued by ill health and misfortune. Without Germain to carry on the family business - he had produced small pictures of cooks which were in great demand in the 1890s, and equal in popularity to similar paintings by Joseph Bail - the sole remaining artist in the family was Désirée-Marie, called Louise (1857-1916). Very little is known of her. It is clear, however, that during a large part of Ribot's later years both his son and daughter created works reflecting themes he is known to have explored himself. Indeed, Germain and Louise became accomplished still-life painters in their own right. Together, these three artists formed a kind of workshop, making it now quite difficult to discern each individual's contributions. They may also have worked in interchangeable styles, further complicating the issue of how many still lifes can actually be credited to Théodule himself.

As early as 1870, and perhaps even before, Germain exhibited paintings at the annual Salon. In the Salon catalogue of that year he was listed as his father's pupil, and it was noted that his still lifes had symbolic overtones. Germain showed works at the annual exhibition throughout the 1870s. During this time his paintings were probably influenced by Antoine Vollon, whom he recorded as his teacher in 1880. Germain's still-life arrangements of vases, flowers and fruits are lighter in colour tonality than his father's. They were undoubtedly produced in the wake of the vogue for still lifes that arose in the Third Republic, and they were designed to please a middle-class clientele in search of paintings to decorate their homes. Those of Germain's paintings that have come up for sale at public auctions in recent years

18 It is generally thought that Ribot's poor health compromised his ability to work and perhaps forced him to train his children to paint alongside him; see Th. Ribot, cit. (note 4).
19 See Chatou, Mairie de Chatou, Acte de Décès, 9 October 1916, no. 161. Louise Ribot's true name is given as Désirée-Marie Ribot, and she is curiously listed as 'sans profession.' In the last reference to her in a Salon catalogue (1908), she gave her address as that of her closest friend, an artist named Claude-Guillaume-Remy Del'Homme. What happened between 1908 and 1916 to cause Del'Homme to claim Louise was without a profession when he signed the death certificate remains a mystery.
20 See Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure... exposés au Palais des Champs Elysées, le 1er Mai, 1870, Paris 1870, nos. 2419 and 2420.
21 Germain is referred to in the catalogue as ‘élève de son père.’ The still lifes were no. 2419, Sciences et arts: nature morte; and no. 2420, Les vases: nature morte, the latter being owned by a certain Dr Robert (present locations unknown).
22 In 1876, for example, Germain exhibited a Nature morte and a work called Vases et fruits; see Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure... des artistes vivants exposés au Palais des Chaps Elysées, le 1er Mai, 1876, Paris 1876, nos. 1731 and 1732 (present locations unknown).
feature a delicate colour range and a selection of objects that are a far cry from the
more sombre still lifes painted by Théodule (fig. 2). Germain remained active until
his death in 1893 which, as we have seen, created a new trauma for the Ribot family.

Early on, Ribot's daughter Louise also established herself as a respectable still-life painter. She exhibited at the Salons of 1877 and 1879, like her brother listing herself
as her father's student. She sold one painting to the government after it had been
shown at the Salon on 1884. In the early 20th century she submitted themes similar
to those painted by her father, including a composition entitled Mendiants (present
to location unknown) that was shown at the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français
in 1900. Louise participated in the Salons of 1902 and 1908 as well, although no
information on the appearance of these works or later history remains. She
maintained the Ribot tradition of creating still lifes for public exhibition. Such efforts
not only kept the family name alive, they also brought in a steady income.

With this in mind, it is now possible to turn to the Veuve Ribot sale of 1896. Out
of the 76 compositions documented, 11 still lifes are noted in the catalogue of works
left in Ribot's studio at the time of his death. Among them are three compositions
of flowers and fruit, which must rank among the more unusual paintings attributed
to the artist.

23 See Paris, Archives Nationales, Dossier Mlle Louise Ribot, F 21/2107. The painting, bought
for 500 francs, was sent to the museum in Douai. Discussions with the museum staff there
in 1997 suggest that even though the painting was in the collection in the late 1930s, it
disappeared during World War II and may even have been destroyed. There is, however, an
existing photograph: see Paris, Musée d'Orsay (Documentation), Album Michelez, 1884,
feuille no. 12. The painting is reproduced in the lower left corner and shows that Louise's
painting style approximates certain compositions attributed to her father.

24 See Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture, architecture, gravure et lithographie
des artistes vivants exposés au Grand Palais des Beaux-Arts, Paris 1900, no. 1121. In this
Salon catalogue Louise gave her address as Vésinet, and in Paris as ‘Chez MM. Bernheim
Jeune et fils, rue Lafitte 8.’ This suggests that Bernheim Jeune handled her paintings and,
after 1900, used her to authenticate work by her father.

25 In the Salon catalogue of 1908 Louise gave her address as 3, Rue des Garennes at Chatou
(the address of Remy Del'Homme); see Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture,
aristes vivants exposés au Grand Palais des Champs Elysées, Paris 1908, no. 1541.

26 See Vente aux enchères de tableaux, études, aquarelles et dessins par Théodule Ribot, Paris
(Hôtel Drouot), 30 May 1896. In his will, Ribot, stipulated that the contents of his studio
could be sold five years after his death. For a discussion of the sale see Edouard Conte,
‘Actualités: vente d'artiste,’ L'Echo de Paris (4 June 1896). Ribot firmly believed that
the value of his paintings would increase after his death. Conte noted that the sale netted 140,000
FF, a considerable amount at the time.

27 Vente aux enchères, cit. (note 26), lots 49-51. No painting of flowers has ever been fully
attributed to Ribot, either in Watteau's archive or through this author's own extensive
research.
Without a specific record of their appearance, it is difficult to comment on them. The themes, however, are certainly more typical of Germain. Since the Ribot family was in financial difficulty, it is tempting to suggest that the painter's wife Marie-Clémentine (who lived until 1903), and daughter extended the body of work on offer by including paintings by other family members, particularly those by Germain. This idea is neither far-fetched nor was it a deliberate attempt to deceive the public. The Ribot family was simply carrying on a traditional practice of family studios, one that was well understood in the 19th century but rarely openly discussed. Ribot's work is marked by a variety of styles, and some of these changes may be explained by the participation of other family members - even students and paid assistants - in the production of certain canvases.

It also becomes clear from the 1896 sale that still lifes had always maintained an important place in Ribot's oeuvre. The sombre tone of the work or type of coarse objects
depicted now made little difference, as the painter simply wanted to paint what he knew intimately. He appears to have explored a limited range of themes, from fish and slabs of meat to rough ceramic containers and eggs on a platter. Each was painted in a similar format, with the scrupulously observed objects placed close to the frontal plane. From the sale, Ribot's considerable strength as a still-life painter becomes apparent through such works as the various versions of the egg meal. Other paintings, with only slight variations in the types of objects depicted or in the lighting effects, reinforce the idea that Ribot occasionally replicated an earlier successful version. One such painting is *Still life with eggs* (fig. 1).

**Ribot's still lifes reconsidered**

There can be little disagreement with the hypothesis that the *Still life with eggs* reproduced in the Veuve Ribot sale catalogue (fig. 3) has exactly the same composition as the canvas now in the Van Gogh Museum, even though the 1896 sale painting is slightly smaller in size. Somewhat perplexing, however, is that the *Oeufs sur le plat* shown at the 1892 retrospective, but without a description or accompanying engraving, has precisely the same dimensions as the museum's painting. This raises a number of questions. Could the owner, Steken, have given the work back to Madame Ribot for inclusion in the 1896 sale, thereby showing his compassion for the family's financial situation? Or could two versions of the subject with slightly different dimensions have been completed? Either solution seems possible, and this composition, with its theme suggesting the preparation of a simple meal, remains among Ribot's most often repeated still lifes. A third variation also existed; it was shown at the 1934 Ribot retrospective in Colombes, but has since disappeared.

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28 Ibid., lot 23.
29 According to the reference in the sale catalogue, the Veuve Ribot canvas is actually two centimetres longer than the canvas shown in 1892. A third possibility - that the sale catalogue is wrong - seems irrelevant since the dimensions given in it are otherwise exceptionally precise.
30 See *Exposition rétrospective Th. Ribot*, cit. (note 3), no. 4. This painting includes a knife in the foreground and another type of ceramic container in the rear, which is slightly different from the one in the Van Gogh Museum piece.
The Van Gogh Museum's painting confirms that Ribot was a realist, as the term was understood by critics in the 1880s. It clearly reveals his keen perception of colour in a sombre setting and with limited light, and his ability to analyse the inner structure of objects and the relationship of shapes. Critics often mentioned these qualities, and described Ribot as a 'true realist' who closely examined his 'models.'

The simple setting, the use of only a few objects set on a spare table, and the limited space behind these forms create spatial relationships that could be seen as extremely modern. In its emphasis

32 Ibid.
on underlying structure and observable truths, Ribot's still-life arrangement was something new at the time, as certain authors correctly perceived.

Considering this unique handling, it seems surprising that a private collector (Steken, for example) would have purchased the *Still life with eggs*. Ribot's still lifes, with their unswerving veracity and in-depth exploration of structure, instead underscore why his works could be considered unsaleable. This ‘unsaleability’ is further reinforced by another version of the painting, now in the museum in Senlis (fig. 4).\(^{33}\) Here Ribot employed still fewer forms and an even starker arrangement, and he used a far more limited range of colours and more penetrating light to analyse the shapes. The same earthenware jug anchors the composition, while to the left lies the plate with eggs and a fork. Light enters from the right, dramatically illuminating one side of the textured jug. It touches the surface of the eggs and the rim of the ceramic vessel to draw attention to their geometric structure. Towards the outer edge is a glass of wine, while a piece of bread is hidden behind the earthenware container. The atmosphere in this work is even more solemn than in the Van Gogh Museum piece. Ribot's brooding darkness wraps these familiar objects in mystery and conveys a sense of almost religious intensity.

The utter simplicity of these objects recalls the work of certain 17th-century Spanish artists, painters with whom Ribot was often associated by his contemporaries.\(^{34}\) Such comparisons, in particular with Diego Velázquez and his treatment of still lifes in ‘bodegone’ compositions, were indeed appropriate. The handling of still-life objects in the foreground of Velázquez's *Water carrier of Seville* (London, Wellington Museum), for example, might have inspired Ribot to play upon the coarse surface textures of

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33 This painting was included in the Veuve Ribot sale; see *Vente aux enchères*, cit. (note 26), lot 22.

34 Gontran, op. cit. (note 31), p. 11, compared Ribot with both Ribera and Rembrandt. Others suggested ties with Zurbaran and Velázquez. These continuing refrains in contemporary art criticism stemmed in part from the Spanish revival that had begun under Napoleon III.
earthenware ceramics in his own paintings. How well Ribot actually knew Spanish sources or if he ever travelled to other countries to see Spanish paintings for himself, however, remains uncertain.

We also find evidence of Ribot's working methods in the Senlis painting. An earlier composition beneath the current image reveals that he painted the canvas without preliminary drawings, modifying and refining the shapes as he went along. Colour tonalities were similarly pursued, until the artist was satisfied with the results.\(^{35}\) This reuse of an earlier canvas - one with a theme that had not been fully resolved - brings up another issue: Ribot had little money to spend on canvas, and he was often forced to overpaint what he had when a composition did not turn out as imagined. Indeed, his selection of simple shapes might well reflect the misery in which he lived, which in turn reinforced the personal strength of his realism. Both the Senlis and Amsterdam versions of *Still life with eggs* are among his most powerful still lifes, and they permit further examination of other principles characteristic of his compositions.

Beneath the Senlis painting is a study of a dead chicken, starkly positioned on a table and painted in a manner similar to the treatment of the same subject in other works. In the Musée Rodin's *Dead chicken* (fig. 5), for example, the flayed bird is seen in direct raking light, used to intensify the scene's veracity. This bird, much like Théodore Géricault's studies of corpses and decapitated heads, is reminiscent of an anatomy lesson. The creature's pallor, the brutally frank positioning of the neck, and the awkward way it rests on the table convey an ungainliness and directness that must have appealed to Rodin. Ribot's uncompromising

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analysis echoes Rodin's own candid and often unflattering studies of the human body. Although Rodin acquired this work for his own collection - which certainly added to Ribot's stature as a still-life painter - little is known of the relationship between the two. The fact that Ribot did studies of the sculptor does, however, suggest that a mutual understanding existed between them.36

In *Still life with a flayed chicken* (fig. 6), on the other hand, Ribot included other objects which shifted the focus somewhat away from the dead bird. Although again positioned in an inelegant way, the chicken has been joined by colourful apples, a ceramic jug and, in the foreground, oysters. These objects seem like little more than an accidental collection of various forms, carefully organised by the artist in his studio, and the spotlighting creates an almost theatrical setting. Was Ribot modifying his approach here, and if so, why? To make matters more difficult, the artist frequently neglected to date his works. It is therefore difficult to determine the precise moment in Ribot's career when this piece was completed. If a work chronology could be established, this painting would likely fall to his later years. As already noted, Ribot's son Germain often painted flowers and fruit, and he perhaps influenced his father's style. Until all the works by the various Ribot family members have been meticulously examined and ordered, however, this must remain pure speculation.

Within this category of kitchen still lifes, Ribot also painted works that included a slab of meat or smaller cutlets.37 These images can be compared with works by François Bonvin (fig. 7), who painted on a slightly larger scale but nevertheless sought to convey the same tactile and visual qualities of the raw meat. While Bonvin's paintings were designed to look well in a dining room or were executed as part of a series for a single owner, Ribot's still lifes could never have functioned in this way. Instead, they reflect his own artistic interests, with little consideration for securing future commissions or sales. Ribot's mastery in depicting the coarseness of meat is especially notable in a picture now in the Kröller-Müller Museum (fig. 8), while the direct visual impact of the raw meat is lessened in a second composition to which eggs and kidneys have been added (fig. 9). The fact that Ribot repeated the same general arrangement several times underscores his intense exploration of the subject matter and his willingness to broaden the type of objects used in his still-life painting without, however, surrendering his brutal sense of realism.

36 For more information see Paris, Musée Rodin, Dossier Ribot. One of Ribot's studies of Rodin is in the museum's collection. The *Dead chicken* was included in the 1934 Ribot retrospective in Colombes: see *Exposition rétrospective Th. Ribot*, cit. (note 3), no. 24 (*Le poulet mort*).

37 This category grew out of the general study of familiar objects; see Weisberg and Talbot, op. cit. (note 14), pp. 48-80. Vollon also specialised in this type of composition, which suggests another way in which Ribot was drawn into the general circle of painters exploring this theme.
fig. 6
Théodule Ribot, *Still life with a flayed chicken*. Caen, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen

fig. 7
François Bonvin, *Still life*, Courtesy Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford
One other still life that challenges *Still life with eggs* in terms of subtlety is *Still life with ceramic jug and apples* (fig. 10). In a very dense environment, Ribot has placed two apples, one cut in half, on a wooden support and against the backdrop of a white cloth. Completing this studio arrangement is a leather garment (most likely a cape or apron) to the left, and a rifle, seen in the dim light to the right. It remains unclear whether these objects were selected as personal items or as attributes of the hunt. Directly behind the apples, in the centre of the canvas, appears the now-familiar earthenware jug, much like the ones seen in Ribot's other works. This reliance on a well-known object brings to mind the studio practices of academic history or military painters such as Alphonse de Neuville or Ernest Meissonier, who kept garments and other accoutrements on hand for their models to wear. Ribot felt similarly comfortable with his objects: the more often he used a form, the more intimately he could discern its nature. His method of constructing his still lifes also reflects those of Bonvin and Vollon. They, too, repeatedly culled from a range of objects kept in their studios.

In the *Still life with ceramic jug and apples* Ribot also spent more time than usual examining the shape of the apples, particularly the one cut in half. The subtle contrast between the whiteness of the apple's core and the other grey, dimly lit shapes, indicates that the artist was moving towards another dimension of still life painting. Despite their physical presence, these forms emerge as deconstructed shapes, abstractions moving in unison to create a very modern kind of harmony. Interested in more than just the illusion of the apple, Ribot was intrigued by its structure as well. Not surprisingly, the architectural qualities of this still life - one of his most original
compositions (and clearly a work that presages the work of Paul Cézanne) - were understood by the artist's friend Rodin, as it was in the sculptor's collection by 1916.38

Through this examination of Ribot's still life paintings it has become evident that the artist valued these works for himself. Whether or not he sold many of these canvases during his lifetime remains a matter of considerable speculation. One thing, however, is certain: still lifes allowed Ribot to fulfil his commitment to a realism akin to a ‘ruthless veracity.’ Without bowing to popular demand and burgeoning middle-class taste, Ribot created still lifes that were pure, honest, intuitive and focused on understanding the fundamental characteristics of the model, be it a coarse ceramic jug or a simple apple. The objects themselves also seem to reflect Ribot's lifestyle, a practical and

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38 Recent discussions with the curatorial staff of the Musée Rodin confirmed that no existing documents establish how or when Rodin obtained this painting. We do know, however, that it was in his collection by 1916. The work can be compared with La gibecière in the Vente aux enchères, although that work has slightly larger dimensions (92 x 74 cm versus 91 x 72 cm for the still life in the Musée Rodin); see Vente aux enchères, cit. (note 26), lot 4.
often stressful existence tinged with a love of simple pleasures. Since these qualities are also found in the best of his genre scenes and portraits, the still lifes provide an important means of assessing the artist's oeuvre as a whole. By working in this vein, Ribot could maintain his independence and originality. This endeared him to other artists, including Rodin, who were likewise striving to forge their own creative personalities outside the norm.

Still-life painting remained a significant part not only of Ribot's artistic output, but also of his family's productivity and livelihood. Only by further examining works by all members of the family will it become possible to reconstruct Ribot's oeuvre accurately. For now we have established - with the help of the *Still life with eggs* - that Théodule Ribot was a painter of raw, visceral strength and an original artist of importance for the future.
fig. 1
Jean-Léon Gérôme, Golgotha (‘Consummatum est’), c. 1868, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum
**Shadows over Jean-Léon Gérôme's career**

*Fred Leeman*

After his first trip to Egypt in 1858 the Dutch artist Willem de Famars Testas (1834-1896) decided to specialise in Orientalism. A number of other Dutch painters, such as Cornelis Kruseman and Ary Scheffer, had already seized the opportunity to explore eastern subjects, but Testas's long stays in the East provided him with more material than others for a specialised career. On his return he exhibited paintings with exotic themes at Kunstliefde in Utrecht and at the annual Leevende Meesters exhibitions. Through his work he came into contact with the Goupil gallery, and also aroused the interest of Jean-Léon Gérôme, the most eminent French Orientalist, who was married to Marie Goupil, a daughter of the firm's founder.

**The journey to Jerusalem**

When Gérôme organised a group for a new expedition to the Levant in 1868, Testas was one of those invited to go along. The party comprised six artists, pupils of Goupil's, but also the already celebrated Léon Bonnat. Albert Goupil, Gérôme's brother-in-law, accompanied the expedition as the official photographer (fig. 2). They even went as far as to reserve one of the seven camels in the caravan for the exclusive transport of his equipment. The destinations were Egypt and Palestine, and Testas and the party arrived in Alexandria in the middle of January 1868. On 3 April, after an adventurous journey through Egypt and the Sinai, the group approached the gates of Jerusalem from Hebron in the south. ‘The first glimpse of Jerusalem was gripping,’ Testas related in his travel notes, ‘the sun-illuminated city was silhouetted against a violet thundery light, whilst the outlying land lay under the shadow of clouds.’

During the following days, close to Palm Sunday, the party visited the Holy City, and on 7 April Testas accompanied Gérôme, Bonnat, Lenoir and Barthélémy on a climb up the Mount of Olives on its eastern flank. At the top of the mount they visited the Chapel of the Ascension, ‘where one is shown a footprint set in stone that is professed to have been made by the foot of Jesus.’ Apparently the weather had cleared up because Testas noted in his diary that ‘from the top of the mount one is blessed with a fantastic view of Jerusalem [...].’

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2 Willem de Famars Testas, cit. (note 1), p. 115. For the - original - French text of the diary (Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden) see exhib. cat. Album de voyage des artistes en expédition au pays du Levant, Tel-Aviv (Museum of Art), Bayonne (Musée Bonnat) & Paris (Musée Hébert) 1993, p. 156: ‘Le premier aspect de Jérusalem était saisissant: la ville éclairée par le soleil, se détachait sur un ciel d'orage violet, le paysage environnant enveloppée dans l'ombre des nuages.’
3 Album de voyage, cit. (note 2), p. 158: ‘Au sommet, nous avons visité la chapelle de l'ascension où on montre une empreinte de pied dans une pierre qu'on dit avoir été imprimé par le pied de Jésus. Du haut de la montagne, on jouit d'une vue magnifique sur Jérusalem [...].’
fig. 2
Albert Goupil, *Notre groupe*, from the *Album B. Journault*, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France
Mount of Olives was already a popular subject for photographers such as the Frenchman Felix Bonfils, who had settled in Beirut in 1867. His panorama, covering three plates, gives a good impression of the view of Jerusalem the painters would have been presented with (fig. 3). At the foot of the slopes of the Mount of Olives there is a glimpse the Kidron Valley with, behind it, the long straight section of the city wall built by Suleiman the Magnificent, intersected on the right by a double gate, the so-called Golden Gate. Above the crenellation rises the Mosque of Omar on the Temple Mount.

Albert Goupil also made photographic studies of the Holy Land. Some of these became the models for the wood engravings illustrating the travel account of one of the expedition members, Paul Lenoir. Albert was an amateur photographer, not a professional, and this may explain why conventions of composition and lighting derived from the fine art of painting are often absent in his work. The Bibliothèque Nationale recently acquired an album of 77 plates of photographs made by Goupil during this expedition.

The painters put up a good show, too, particularly Gérôme. One of the expedition members described with great admiration how every day, as soon as the camp had been set up, he could be seen ‘commencing a study - neither rain nor wind having the power to move him from his camping stool.’ At least one of the studies Gérôme made in situ in Jerusalem has been preserved: a view of the city from the west in clear weather (fig. 4). It was here, in front of the Jaffa gate, that the company pitched their tents on 3 April. On a previous visit, at Easter in 1862, the painter described the area outside the city as follows: ‘The surroundings are desolate, stones everywhere, sparse vegetation, crooked olive trees bent double by the wind, but the region is by no means commonplace, once seen it is

4 See Will H. Rockett, ‘The Bonfils story: a legacy of light,’ Aramco World (November-December 1983). The Panorama de Jérusalem shown here is attributed to Felix Bonfils on the basis of the plate-number (298). The reproductions are from a collection of photographs of the Middle East once belonging to Richard Polak (Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet, inv. no. 54A2). See also below, footnote 9.
5 Albert Goupil (1840-1884), son of Adolphe, the founder of the firm, is primarily known as a collector of oriental works of art. He transformed his house at 7, Rue Chaptel into an exotic palace. The illustrations from the catalogue of the auction held after his death give an impression of the richness of his collection: Objets d'art et de l'orient et de l'occident. Tableaux, dessins composant la collection de feu M. Albert Goupil, Paris (Hôtel Drouot), 28 April 1888.
6 This album once belonged to one of the expedition's participants, the painter Ernest Journault. As late as 1993 the compilers of the Album de voyage catalogue (cit. [note 2]) regretted the fact that none of Albert Goupil's photographs of the 1868 expedition had survived. With thanks to Pierre-Lin Renié, curator at the Musée Goupil in Bordeaux, who drew my attention to the existence of this album.
never forgotten.’" Four years earlier, it seems, the expedition had also been plagued by stormy weather.

On 12 April, loaded down with studies, Gérôme bade the group an early farewell to return to France. Apparently he wanted to be back in time for the opening of the Salon, in which two of his works were to be exhibited: *Jérusalem* and *The 7th of December 1815, nine o’clock in the morning*, better known as *The execution of Marshall Ney* (fig. 6). The former has recently been added to the collection of the Musée d’Orsay, while the Van Gogh Museum acquired a smaller version of the same composition in 1995 (fig. 1).

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8 See Gerald M. Ackerman, ‘Jean-Léon Gérôme, à cinquante ans, dresse le bilan de sa propre carrière: son autobiographie, rédigée en 1874,’ *Bulletin de la Société d’Agriculture, Lettres, Sciences et Arts de Haute Saone* 14 (1980), p. 15: ‘Le caractère de la contrée est désolant, des pierres partout, une végétation maigre, des oliviers à formes rachitiques, tourmentés par la tempête, mais ce n’est pas un pays banal, et quand on l’a vu, on ne saurait l’oublier.’ This article reproduces the manuscript of the autobiographical notes the artist made for the painter and art critic Charles Timbal, who published a critical biography of Gérôme in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1878.
Gérôme's ‘Jérusalem’

*Jérusalem* shows a rocky mount in the foreground, brightly illuminated by the low-lying sun, on which the shadows of three crosses can be seen. A procession of mounted- and foot-soldiers moves in a long winding line down the hill and through the valley to the double city gate. Above the city walls, exactly in the middle of the canvas, rises the Temple, it, too, illuminated by the low-lying sun. In view of the short period of time between his departure from Jaffa and the opening of the Salon (2 May), Gérôme must have completed the greater part of the larger version before leaving for the Middle East.

Gérôme's Orientalist paintings were renowned for their documentary precision, their attention to detail and the smooth manner in which they were painted. As Paul Lenoir later wrote: ‘one could say that his paintings are
photographic, if photography were an art.' In an article of 1868 Emile Galichon noted: ‘nobody can boast as photographic an eye as Gérôme.’ Indeed, a kind of ‘photo realism’ does appear to underlie this rather exceptional religious painting. This is not only due to the way the Crucifixion has been painted - all signs of a personal touch have been expelled - but also to the apparently extraordinary effort put into achieving historical and topographical accuracy. On the one hand, there was the individual, physical experience of the painter, who has actually seen and felt the landscape around Jerusalem; on the other, there was the strong urge for historical exactitude, which not only forced him to create a faithful, archaeologically reliable reconstruction of the details in his painting, but also to break with the age-old iconographic traditions of Christian imagery. However, Gérôme has made the au-

9 Paul Lenoir, *Le Fayoum, Le Sinaï et Pétra. Expédition dans la moyenne Egypte et l'Arabie pétrée sous la direction de J.L. Gérôme*, Paris 1872, introduction: ‘on pourrait dire que ses tableaux sont de la photographie, si la photographie était un art.’ Unfortunately Lenoir’s account ends in Hebron, so the visit to Jerusalem is not included. Of course, we cannot be certain if Gérôme actually used photographs for *Jérusalem*, whether by Bonfils or others. There were certainly numerous photographs of the area in existence, such as those by Auguste Salzmann (*Jérusalem. Etude et reproduction photographique des monuments de la Ville Sainte depuis l'epoque judaïque jusqu'à nos jours*, 2 vols., Paris 1856); Francis Frith (*Sinai and Palestine photographed*, London [1857]); Frank Mason Good (1866-67); and William von Herford (1856-57). None of these panoramas, however, comes anywhere near as close to Gérôme's painting as Bonfils's (see fig. 3). With thanks to Mattie Boom, Curator of Photography at the Rijksprentenkabinet, for tracing these pictures.

The authenticity of both time and place secondary to a theatrical presentation, the elements of which are unthinkable without the work of the photographer - a constant presence on his trips.

The bare hilltop in the foreground is based on the study Gérôme painted at the site (fig. 4). The rocks depicted were in fact to the west of Jerusalem, outside the Lion's Gate, whilst the Salon painting shows Jerusalem from the east, looking towards the Temple Mount. The painter has thus transported them to the other side of the city. The bare hill upon which the three crosses cast their shadows, crowned by skull-like stones, cannot, therefore, be Golgotha. Even though the precise historical location of the ‘Skull Hill’ is unclear, it is known to have been somewhere northwest of the city, that is, near the place where Gérôme had first found his boulders. Entirely contrary to both topographical reality and historical tradition, the hill in the painting must then be the Mount of Olives, at the foot of which the Garden of Olives, Gethsemane, was to be found. This anomaly becomes even more remarkable if one considers that the painter had climbed the Mount himself and described the surroundings in his diary. Presumably, he even had photographs of the panorama at his disposal, like those taken by Bonfils (fig. 3), as details such as the shadows on the city wall and the cypress trees on the Temple Mount are faithfully reproduced in the painting.

Strangely enough, the low-lying sun which causes the crosses to cast their shadows is positioned in the northeast in the painting, nicely in keeping with the shadow-effects on the rock mass. The crescent moon can be pinpointed as somewhere in the northwest. According to the Gospels Jesus died at three o’clock in the afternoon; the sky darkened in broad daylight and the sun and the moon shone at the same time. If Gérôme had been welcomed by stormy weather on his arrival in Jerusalem and if this did not provide him with the idea for his painting, it certainly supplied him with the visual information necessary for its dramatic lighting. The description of the stormy skies in Testas's travel notes shows a particularly striking resemblance to the purple light of the painting.

Two Roman soldiers dressed in white tunics turn around to look at the crosses, their hands raised as if in a gesture of farewell, or perhaps only to shade their eyes from the sinking sun. According to Christian tradition these must be the first converts: the centurion Longinus,

fig. 4

11 Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45: ‘And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.’
who pierced Jesus's side but later recognised him to be the Son of God, and the soldier Stephaton, who gave Him the sponge drenched in vinegar. Half way up the hill we see the Venus Temple which, according various Church Fathers, had been built on this site by the Romans. The background is dominated by the Temple of Jerusalem.

Moving ‘Golgotha’ to the other side of Jerusalem enabled Gérôme to have the Crucifixion take place on a spectacular hill outside the city, just as religious tradition dictated. Against the perspective of this grand panorama the painter was able to present it as an overwhelming event of cosmic proportions. The gigantic shadows cast by the three crosses accentuate the minuteness of the powerful Temple in the distance. The threatening storm seems to announce its impending destruction. Gérôme was conscious of the fact that he had invented a radical new way of presenting the biblical scene ‘[...] at odds with the old, respectable traditions.’

This was not the only time Gérôme employed shadows as a means of indicating an ominous presence. In a canvas of the same period entitled *Oedipus* (fig. 5) - a title chosen to suggest profound reflection - we see Napoleon on horseback, a solitary figure in front of the Sphinx of Giza. His escort has not been included in the picture, but their silhouettes can be seen in the sand behind him. The addition of ‘accidental’ shadows of this type was probably

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13 Ibid.
14 In Christian iconography it was customary to contrast the triumphant figure of Ecclesia, the New Covenant at the foot of the cross, with Synagogue, representing the Old Covenant, with a falling crown and the broken staff of the Old Testament. See, for example, Emile Mâle, *L'art religieux en France au XIIIe siècle*, Paris 1910, p. 227, fig. 100.
15 Ackerman, op. cit. (note 8), p. 16: ‘C’était rompre avec les traditions antiques et vénérées.’
suggested to the painter by photography. The a-selective camera lens can only record what is there, and cannot choose between essential and arbitrary phenomena. Gérôme has made a virtue of necessity and put this typical photographic ‘defect’ to good use, thereby allowing his scene to gain in realistic expressivity.

Another dramatic device often found in Gérôme’s work is represented by the extreme foreshortening of the shadows of the three crosses contrasted with the departing crowd. *The execution of Marshall Ney* (fig. 6), exhibited at the same time as *Jerusalem*, was considered by Gérôme himself to be ‘very different in style and design.’\(^{16}\) Ackerman has quite rightly argued, however, that there are nonetheless a great number of parallels between the two works, and that both refer to the renowned *Death of Caesar*, the first version of which, it is true, dated back to 1859 but of which a still more detailed version had been carried out for the Exposition Universelle of 1867 (Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery). In both cases the body of the executed victim is shown in extreme forshortening in the foreground, while the executioners - small, insignificant figures - make their exit. The focus is not the dramatic climax of the event, but the moment afterwards. The person looking at the scene is made witness to an historical development whose pre-history and outcome he already knows. The killing of the protagonists is implied, but by concentrating on its aftermath the artist conjures up the eminence of the victims and the consequences of their deaths for world history. By eliminating their physical presence, the murderers, or those who gave the orders, believed they could destroy the spirits of their victims.

With these dramatic entries to the Salon of 1868, Gérôme created a distinct image of himself as a history painter tackling the most serious and elevated subjects. It is evident that *The execution of Marshall Ney* is Gérôme’s answer to Manet’s shocking *Execution of Emperor Maximillian* (Mannheim, Städtische Kunstsammlungen). Manet worked on this painting - an indictment of
Emperor Napoleon III's disastrous Mexican adventure - at about the same time. Presumably Gérôme hoped that his picture, by contrast, would be greeted with enthusiasm by the Bonapartists. After Waterloo, Ney - who had joined the emperor's forces in 1815 when Napoleon returned from Elba - was sentenced to death for treason by a reactionary court. Three of his sons served in Napoleon III's army, so a warm welcome for the painting might have been expected. Gérôme's intentions, however, backfired. One of the sons, the Due d'Enghien, begged the powerful Surintendant des Beaux-Arts, Nieuwerkerke, to remove the work from the exhibition, probably because its realistic depiction - Ney is shown lying face-down in the mud - was deemed disrespectful. Gérôme noted proudly that he had remained steadfast in his refusal to comply, remarking that 'painters have the right to write history with their brushes, just as writers do with their pens.'

The painting provoked extremely contradictory reactions: the Legimitists accused him of flattering the imperial regime, whilst the Bonapartists denounced his unbridled ambition.

Gérôme's patently obvious attempts to flatter those in power elicited the scorn of the cartoonist Gill. He published a caricature of Jérusalem in his Salon pour Rire of 1868 (fig. 7) in which the shadows of the crosses have been given the shape of the insignia of knighthood. The caption runs: 'This painting, the first to attract the attention of the crowds which gather by the entrance, is understood to be a rebus, a picture puzzle, etc. Nevertheless it is as simple as can be. A few crosses cast their shadows on a poor painting. With this M. Gérôme has clearly tried to show that nothing is more damaging to art than the sort of reward that is administered haphazardly.' The fact that the basic idea for The execution of Marshall Ney already been used repeatedly in Gérôme's work, and was ultimately drawn from his Death

17 Manet wanted to exhibit this painting at the Salon of 1869, but he was given to understand that it would be rejected on the grounds of its anti-imperialism. During the two years Manet worked on the painting's various versions it must have been known in artistic circles; see exhib. cat. Manet, Paris (Grand Palais) & New York (Metropolitan Museum) 1983, pp. 529-31. Gérôme's blind wall also plays an important role in the Manet. For a different view of the relationship between Gérôme's and Manet's work see Juliet Wilson-Bareau et al., exhib. cat. Painting, politics, censorship, London (National Gallery) 1992, pp. 101-02. The use of the execution date in the ‘official’ titles of both works is reminiscent of Goya's Third of May 1808 (Madrid, Museo del Prado). Ackerman was the first to point out the competition between Gérôme and Manet: see ‘Gérôme et Manet,’ Gazette de Beaux-Arts 70 (September 1967), pp. 169-70.

18 Ackerman, op. cit. (note 8), p. 16: ‘[..] les peintres avaient le droit d'écrire l'histoire avec leur pinceau aussi bien que les littérateurs avec leur plume [...]’
of Caesar, was treated by Gill in an hilarious series of caricatures entitled Décès célèbres, which concluded with the death of the painter himself.

**Critical debate**

Gérôme consistently underestimated the political and religious implications of his stylistic and iconographic innovations in this period. ‘These paintings caused me a great deal of trouble,’ he was later to recall with regret in his discussion of the Salon of 1868. The *Jérusalem* was just as much an infringement of decorum as the *Execution*. Even critics who were generally well-disposed towards the painter, such as Théophile Gautier and Edmond About, had their reservations. About, who had been a member of the expedition to the Orient in 1868, held up the complete artist, Gérôme, as a model for realist painters like Courbet,
who thought they could get away without study. About saw Gérôme as an ingenious painter filled with ‘insatiable curiosity,’ who nonetheless knew how to direct his talent through careful study. He realised that many people had expressed a certain amount of amazement about Jérusalem, but in his view the strongly criticised lighting was in keeping with the biblical text, and the setting and figures revealed the hand of a master. He did not, however, defend the painter's iconographic invention.

Gautier went into great detail about the original moment chosen: after Christ has already died. He called the shadows ‘a bizarre and original invention.’ He understood the implication that ‘the shadow of an execution is more terrifying than the deed itself,’ but added that this ‘idea is probably a little too ingeniously literary for a painting.’ Nevertheless Gautier felt that painters should be free to invent something new, particularly if the subject had been painted so frequently and the work was not destined for a specific religious purpose, ‘although,’ he added, ‘there is always the lurking danger that one will succumb to fancifulness.’ After an elaborate description of the landscape, he summarised the confusion the painting had caused him as follows: ‘The effect of this composition is strange and leads one's judgment astray: to which category should it really be allotted?’ In light of the fact that the landscape and the figures were given equal importance, he decided to assign it to the rubric ‘Tableau d'histoire pittoresque.’ On the other hand, the accuracy of the topography made it a specifically modern painting; the Jerusalem Gérôme painted he had seen in real life, and for this reason his picture was a great step forward when compared with a work like Mantegna's Crucifixion (Paris, Louvre).

What undoubtedly was a sincere attempt to modernise religious art was met with incomprehension by the critics of an ultramontane disposition. The painter-critic

21 Théophile Gautier, ‘Salon de 1868,’ Moniteur Universel (2 May 1868), pp. 1-2: ‘C'est là certes un invention originale et bizarre [...] L'ombre du supplice est plus effrayante que le supplice lui-même; mais peut-être est-ce là une idée un peu trop ingénieusement littéraire pour la peinture. [...] il est bien permis après tout de chercher le neuf, même au risque de rencontrer le baroque, surtout lorsque l'oeuvre n'a pas une destination spécialement religieuse [...] L'effet de cette composition est étrange et déroute le jugement. [...] Le meilleur titre à lui donner serait: Tableau d'histoire pittoresque.’
Claudius Lavergne addressed his particularly scathing remarks to the artist in the conservative-Catholic *L' Univers*. He accused Gérôme of painting riddles, ‘toiles logogriphiques,’ and claimed that he could not manage to decipher the work without an explanatory text. The canvas was nothing more than ‘provocative mystification’: Jerusalem ‘in no way resembles the Holy City,’ and the Calvary in the foreground appeared at first glance to be empty; indeed, it was a ‘bizarre invention’ but not ‘original,’ as Gautier had maintained. He sarcastically compared Gérôme’s invention with picture puzzles. The critic referred to the painter derisively as a ‘peintre ethnographique,’ who had unfortunately looked to the Orient to replenish his inspiration, which had run dry.²² Lavergne was a friend of the painter Hippolyte Flandrin, who had painted a neo-Giottesque cycle of the life of Christ in Saint Germain-des-Près around 1860. When the

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frescos were criticised for their lack of historical precision, Lavergne defended the right of painters to create idealised depictions of biblical history, focusing on the symbolic meaning of the events. His aversion to the naturalistic treatment of religious themes even led him to censure the *Immaculate Conception* by Murillo in the Louvre.

**Ernest Renan**

Lavergne's biting critique of Gérôme's *Jérusalem* can not be dissociated from the Shockwave caused by the publication of Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus* in 1863. Following in the footsteps of German theologians, Renan was bent upon analyzing the Bible as an historical literary source. In order to do so he made use of modern historical-critical and philological methods. The fact that for Renan the Bible was no longer unconditionally the Word of God, and its only permissible interpretation given by the doctrinal authority of the Church, was seen in conservative-Catholic circles as a serious threat. It was Renan's positivist approach to the Gospel that led many painters away from depicting biblical history according to the standard sacred images handed down by the tradition, showing them instead as historical events that had occured at a certain time and place in the past. By placing biblical history in the 'there' and 'then' painters thus relativised its universal significance. Catholicism, whose very existence depends on the opportunity of repeating a hallowed form of the Crucifixion in the 'here' and 'now' - i.e. through the Sacrifice of the Mass - was threatened to the core by a representation of events such as that given by Gérôme.

Orientalism had led artists into temptation. On their journeys to the Orient painters came into contact with a culture they could interpret in no other way than by using their knowledge of the Bible. ‘The Bible is here a painting of modern manners and customs,’ wrote Gustave Flaubert in 1850 from Cairo. At that time painters had already been practising ‘biblical Bedouinism,’ as it was sarcastically called, for more than ten years. The most famous of these biblical Orientalists was Horace Vernet: after travelling through Algeria, he exhibited *Rebecca at the well* (present location unknown), in which Rebecca is shown dressed in oriental attire, at the Salon of 1835. In 1846 he gave a speech at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in which he defended a painter's right to depict biblical history in oriental costume. Driskel has rightly pointed out that opting for biblical realism implied a direct attack on ultramontane aesthetics. For the time being, however, the New Testament was spared this type of painterly reinterpretation. Alexandre Descamps, who after his trip to the Middle East in 1827 could boast of first-hand oriental experience, was the first artist to 'update' not only the Old Testament but the New Testament as well. In 1847 he painted *Christ at the...*
Praetorium (Paris, Musée d'Orsay), which shows the Saviour surrounded by modern oriental figures

There were soon protests from the painters' ranks as well, voices raised in condemnation of the often all-too realistic representation of biblical history. In his travel journal Un été dans le Sahara (1856) the painter-writer Eugène Fromentin enthusiastically proclaimed that the country and inhabitants of North Africa provided the very image of the biblical Israel. But he immediately added that 'only half of it is true.' It was the old problem of couleur locale and costume that was raised here, once again bringing into play an axiom in art theory that had already had a major role in 17th-century French classicism, namely that history painters should increase the credibility of their scenes by making correct and historically reliable choices in terms of people's costume and in their portrayal of landscape. Fromentin opposed those who sought to revive religious art by looking for inspiration in the Orient. The ideal of historical exactitude did not apply to biblical scenes: 'Dressing up the Bible means destroying it; it is like dressing a demigod, and in so doing making him a human being. Placing him in a recognisable topography means transgressing against his spirit; it is to
translate history into an a-historical book. However, the idea does need to be clothed. The masters achieved this by stripping the form of its accidental features and by simplifying it, that means repressing all local colour - that would be sticking as closely as possible to the truth.27 Raphael and Poussin had understood this perfectly.

Renan himself, who had paved the way for the arrival of an historical Jesus, was also opposed to the historicisation of religious art. His Nouvelles études d'histoire religieuse includes a fascinating dissertation on religious painting. He dealt at great length with the phenomenon, much remarked upon, that it is often not the works of great masters like Raphael or Michelangelo that evoke our religious feelings. Instead they ‘inspire a sort of liberal pride, which is not exactly the same as religious piety.’28 It is rather ‘harmless platitudes’ that move the humble, simple masses. Artists like Paul Delaroche, who ‘wanted to paint the Gospel as he paints history,’29 had missed the point. Renan claimed that Delaroche, who was Gérôme's teacher, had a tendency to opt for the anecdotal in place of the iconography made sacred by tradition. This was ‘a profanation’ and in Renan's view a sign of the advancement of materialism into religion. Renan believed that religious art should be neither suggestive of historical reality nor anecdotal, but that it should contain certain ‘unparalleled symbols, made sacred by humanity, accepted by everyone, and to which nothing may be added.’30 It is interesting to note that Renan made a clear distinction between art that should rouse the simple minded to devotion and his own historical analysis and interpretation of the life of Jesus.31

In 1870, when a new edition of his Vie de Jésus appeared with illustrations by Godefroy Durand, however, it excelled in following Renan's text to the letter. Durand's illustrations of the Crucifixion are probably the most realistic renderings of the evangelical text ever made. On the basis of his study of Roman torture methods, Renan had become convinced that the cross must have been T-shaped

27 Eugène Fromentin, ‘Un été dans le Sahara,’ in Oeuvres complètes, Paris 1984, pp. 47-48: ‘Costumer la Bible c'est la d'êtruire; comme habiller un demi-dieu, c'est en faire un homme. La placer en un lieu reconnaisable, c'est la faire mentir à son esprit; c'est traduire en histoire un livre antéhistorique. Comme à toute force, il faut vêtir l'idée les maîtres ont compris que dépouiller la forme et la simplifier, c'est-à dire supprimer toute couleur locale, c'était se tenir aussi près que possible de la vérité [...].’
28 Ernest Renan, Nouvelles études d'histoire religieuse, Paris 1884, p. 408: ‘Raphael, Michel-Ange ou Titien [...] inspirent une sorte de fierté libérale qui n'est pas précisément la piété chrétienne.’
29 Ibid., p. 409: ‘il voulut peindre l'Evangile comme il avait peint l'histoire.’
30 Ibid., p. 410: ‘pour le grand art [...] il n'existe qu'un symbole incomparable, consacré par l'humanité, adopté de tous, et auquel il n'est permis de rien ajouter.’
31 The parallel between the ideas of the liberal Ernest Renan and the leader of the Dutch liberal party Frits Bolkestein is inescapable. Although Bolkestein does not call himself a Christian, he does consider Christianity to be useful as a binding element in western culture.
with short cross-beams. Durand based his depiction on this conclusion, thus breaking entirely with tradition (fig. 8). Gérôme did not dare to go this far in Jérusalem, for no matter how unusual his point of view and choice of time might be, the shadows of the crosses themselves still have their customary form; without this, the scene would have been in danger of being unrecognisable.

Marketing ‘Jérusalem’

It was the criticism from religious circles that hurt the pious Gérôme most, and in his autobiography, written eight years later, he still felt the need to justify himself at great length. In support of his unusual manner of representation he stressed the artist's right to invent ‘a new form of narration.’ He even found that his expressive in-

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32 The T-form cross was the focus of an intense debate between ultramontane Catholics and the Jansenists, who are said to have argued for a T-shaped cross from the 17th century onwards; see Driskel, op. cit. (note 26), pp. 87ff.

33 Ackerman, op. cit. (note 8), p. 18. Here, once again, Gérôme shows himself to be a worthy heir of classical theory: Poussin, for example, expressed the same view in the remarks published by Giovanni Bellori as an appendix to his Vita of the painter (Le Vite de'pittori scultori et achitetti moderni, Rome 1672, pp. 460-62).
vention possessed ‘a certain poetry,’ and thus echoed the time-honoured link between the arts of painting and verse. After all, had not Horace in his *Ars Poetica* allowed for a certain amount of *licentia*, proclaiming the freedom of both the poet and other artists to depart from well-trodden paths in their creations? Furthermore, Gérôme wrote, he had not relied on literary anecdote, but had only chosen an unusual time of day for his depiction; even the shadows were merely an expressive artistic device; seen as a whole, he had remained entirely ‘within the domain of art.’

The only person who praised Gérôme for this invention in so many words was the one person who otherwise never failed to taunt him on political-artistic grounds: Théophile Thoré. From his romantic point of view, with Delacroix serving as his great hero, the finished look and excessive smoothness of Gérôme’s style was, generally speaking, unbearable; but he praised the painter of *Jérusalem* for his ‘subtle invention,’ which he saw as a ‘caprice très-artiste.’ Goya and Daumier, two of Thoré’s favourite masters, were cited as artists who could have invented something similar in their graphic work. Thoré thought this type of creativeness did not harmonise with Gérôme’s style, however; it had deserved a freer, more imaginative hand instead.

Neither of the 1868 Salon paintings had the success their maker, and his sponsor Goupil, had expected. In 1871, three years after being exhibited, they disappeared abroad. The *Execution of Marshall Ney* went to England, which apparently felt more favourable towards this ‘judicial murder’ than the country where it had actually taken place. In the same year Goupil sold the second work, by now under the more explanatory title of *Golgotha. Consummatum est!* to his colleague Knoedler in New York for the substantial sum of 30,000 francs. Knoedler must have sold it before 1873 to Henry N. Smith, as it was he who lent it to the Brooklyn Art Association’s spring exhibition that year, under yet another title: *After the Crucifixion.* Having changed hands a number of times in America, the painting was eventually auctioned at Christie’s, New York, in 1990, where it was acquired by the Musée d'Orsay - which has shown it as part of its permanent collection ever since. In his monograph on Gérôme, published in 1986, Ackerman had assumed that the painting was lost; he was only familiar with a photographic reproduction and the large-size engraving (55 × 96 cm) made by Herman Eichens and published by Goupil in 1871. Both the painter and the dealer, just like the critic Thoré, must have recognised the composition’s graphic potential, because a small-scale replica was executed to serve as a model for the print. This replica was also sold abroad, this time to the Netherlands.

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34 Ackerman, op. cit. (note 8), p. 18.
38 In an undated memo (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Van Gogh Museum archives) Ackerman clarified the origins of both versions. The print by Herman Eichens was offered for sale in Goupil’s reproduction catalogue for 240 francs, as an *épreuve d'art*; it was one of the firm’s most expensive prints (see *Catalogue général de Goupil & Cie.*, Paris [n.d.], p. 16). The popularity of the composition in the Netherlands is confirmed by a the existence of
it was sold by Goupil's Hague branch to Th. Soeterik. In 1939 it surfaced again, appearing in the auction catalogue of the Rooyards van den Ham collection. According to an annotated edition of the catalogue, the painting went for f 2750 and was bought by W.A. Rooyards. In all likelihood the painting stayed in the same collection until it was bought by the Van Gogh Museum in 1995.

The vicissitudes of the various versions of the painting are symptomatic of its problematic nature. It is a religious picture made not for a religious context or even for religious worship, but destined for an exhibition, where it was designed to stand out among thousands of other paintings. The painter, like most of the public to whom his work was addressed, was imbued with positivist ideas about historical and topographical accuracy. He was even prepared to go on a hazardous expedition to make his painting as true-to-life as possible. But instead of praise the work earned him a barrage of criticism, most of which was entirely insensitive to his efforts at exactitude. Many critics were concerned with a higher truth, and wanted to see the Crucifixion as a sign of the Redemption. Others

39 The hague branch of Goupil's purchased the work on 28 February 1872 and sold it a week later, on 7 March. With thanks to Ronald de Leeuw.
40 Tableaux Modernes collection Royaards van den Ham de feu Madame douarière W.J. Royaards van den Ham à Utrecht, Frederik Muller (Amsterdam), 8 November 1910, lot 27; see The Hague, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), F. Muller & Co. archives.
41 Maria Poprzecka has given thorough consideration to the 'exhibition value' of religious works of art in the 19th century; see idem, ‘Le sacré au Salon,’ in Francis Haskell (ed.), Saloni, gallerie, musei e loro influenza sullo sviluppo dell'arte dei secoli XIX e XX, Bologna 1979, pp. 49-53.
mainly condemned his shadows for being inartistic: spectacular, modern and photographically tainted pictorial inventions. For Gérôme, however, they were meant not only to make the picture less banal, to demonstrate the import of its subject in terms of world history, but also to help the viewer witness and participate in what had happened in the same way a photograph would. To achieve this effect, which the painter himself called poetic, he even acted contrary to his principles as far as the topographical accuracy of his presentation was concerned.

But Gérôme also failed in the eyes of the avantgarde, realist critics. Thoré specified quite precisely that it was the friction between the painter's poetic invention and the ethically and politically compromising smoothness, precision and slickness of its execution that formed the inner contradiction of the painting. It was only in a context where these ideological and stylistic controversies played no role that the two versions of the painting could be accepted, namely among private collectors outside France, in this instance in America and the Netherlands. It was only on all-forgiving museum walls, with their historically balanced overview, that they could find their last resting place.

In his own time Gérôme's artistic inventions were hardly imitated at all. It is possible that William Holman Hunt was inspired by the shadows of the crosses in Jérusalem when, in a piece of ‘disguised symbolism,’ he showed Jesus as a young man casting an ominous shadow on the wall of his father's carpentry workshop. Mary appears to recognise this reference to her son's future suffering (fig. 9). Eventually it was the surrealists who best exploited Gérôme's unintentional discrepancy between academic craftsmanship and artistic invention. Dali frequently mentioned Gérôme as one of his favourite artists, whilst Giorgio de Chirico developed the foreboding shadow of the unseen into his metaphysical trademark.

fig. 1
Carlos Schwabe, *Madonna with lilies*, 1899, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum
The visual imagery of a symbolist: Carlos Schwabe's *Madonna with lilies*

Henk van Os

For Ronald de Leeuw

In the *Van Gogh Bulletin* 1993 (no. 3), Edwin Becker gave a definitive account of Carlos Schwabe's *Madonna with lilies* (fig. 1). Nonetheless, this wonderful watercolour can still provide us with an opportunity to further explore the imagery of the symbolists, and in particular their approach to traditional depictions of Christian subjects. Becker rightly observed that the greater part of 19th-century religious art is usually associated with clichés and phoney sentimentality. But why is this? Often it is due to the artists' attempts to imbue biblical stories and Christian scenes with the greatest possible realism and conviction. They had to be made 'real.' Not only were these themes fully exploited for their dramatic potential; the artist also strove to portray the full affective significance of the religious experience. As they themselves were well aware, 19th-century painters of Christian images mostly worked for pious viewers. Mawkishness was the result. More enlightened minds were infuriated by such insubstantial realism and by the inherent meekness of products of this sort. Only when a considerable distance from the art and religiosity of the 19th century had been achieved did it become possible for a handful of amateurs to take pleasure in these Christian works; others, however, continue to revile them as examples of insupportable sentimentality.

But something more exceptional was afoot with the 19th-century religious symbolists. For them, it was not enough just to add an emotional charge to a Christian story: instead, they used elements from older works to create their own world of visual imagery. Quite often their paintings were accompanied by arcane texts. These made one thing abundantly clear: that the artist was filled with profound thoughts and beautiful sentiments. To be sure, such thoughts and sentiments are comprehensible when rendered in a visual form; when expressed verbally, however, they are disorganised and vague. In this respect there is a great similarity between symbolists of this sort and modern artists, who often have a striking predilection for texts that lie somewhere between philosophy and mysticism. Art critics in the years around 1900, and many art historians with them, did much to ensure that symbolist religious art was almost entirely engulfed by an avalanche of semi-hysterical, semi-mystical gibberish. Artists' subjective representation of Christian motifs became an excuse for others to unleash their own subjectivity. Becker cites the example of G. Soulier's discussion of Schwabe's watercolour in *Art et Décoration* (1899), in which the critic attempts to describe the sentiments evoked by the work. In his opinion, the lilies are filled with a 'tender significance [*sens attendri*], simultaneously that of an enclosure which protects her [the Madonna] and of an offering that raises itself around her; of a compassion that surrounds her and of a pleading caress [...] In his [Schwabe's] hands, the plants become more human; he always seeks to express that brotherhood shared by all creation.'

It is scarcely surprising that many people sought to keep their distance from works associated with such verbiage. And precisely because art historians saw this art as
an excuse to open the floodgates of their own emotion, remarkably few sober analyses of symbolist religious art have ever been made. So how in fact did these painters approach Christianity's existing iconographic tradition? Such a question is entirely justified with regard to the work at hand. Schwabe employs a range of traditional Christian motifs: the Madonna and Child, the sky, the earth, clouds, lilies. Is there indeed anything in this painting that is not traditional or symbolic? To answer this, we must look at the artist's treatment of clouds in particular. From time immemorial, clouds have served to announce an apparition. From elsewhere, for example the sky - but in any case from above - God, Jesus, the Virgin or a saint would appear to the spectator. Clouds marked this temporary visibility in the mortal world (fig. 2). As the dynamics of the
apparitio dictate, they who appear must also disappear, for those who represent salvation are viewed only briefly.

Clouds were also used in scenes that are far more static, those in which it is important to make a distinction between heaven and earth. Above, God sits enthroned, perhaps with the Virgin Mary and Jesus, amid the heavenly host; below is the earth, the realm to which the viewer belongs, aspiring to a future place above. But a footpath of clouds linking ‘above’ with ‘below,’ as in Schwabe's watercolour, is highly unusual. For while it is the function of clouds to separate heaven and earth, both in static and dynamic representations, here a cloud-path connects them. With this motif, Carlos Schwabe has devised something exceptional.

This work makes the impossible possible. But how possible is it? Who, for example, can walk on clouds? The answer is: Schwabe's Madonna. In order to achieve this, however, she has been completely deprived of her corporality: in fact, she is little more than a translucent gown. Her child is so ethereal that only His eyes provide some kind of certainty. And from the single lily Mary received from Gabriel upon his annunciation of the Saviour's virgin birth, Schwabe has made an entire hedge, running along the cloud-path. The radiant haloes, attributes of sainthood, contribute to the transparency of the figures' presence.

The viewer could meet the Virgin halfway down the cloud-path, but then he, too, would have to become free of his body. The fin de siècle was characterised by a longing for spiritualisation, for the transcendence of material existence. In Carlos Schwabe's world, the most celebrated spokesman of this desire was Joséphin Péladan, the founder of the Salon de la Rose + Croix. In 1892 Schwabe designed the poster for its first exhibition (fig. 3). Two years later he painted the Madonna with lilies (Lausanne, private collection), the first in a long series to which the Van Gogh Museum version (1899) also belongs. While both works have the same theme, in the poster the upward path is a staircase on which lilies grow, and the ‘ethereal’ is given a somewhat more straightforward symbolisation, in that the woman on the higher
tread is simply presented in outline. The cloud-path in the watercolour takes the
viewer from darkness into light, and on that road Mary awaits him. Although seen
here with her son, she is not really shown as the Mother of God, and neither figure
is represented as a saviour. They merely look down towards the mortals below, who
are free to set out on the journey of self-transcendence. The Virgin personifies a
spiritual ideal; she is a symbol of something incorporeal. It thus became possible for
a Protestant like Carlos Schwabe to accept her.

Behind this symbolic imagery lies a concept of redemption which, despite its many
Christian elements, is not essentially Christian in nature. Although Schwabe's
watercolour is a kind of altarpiece, and although it is the Virgin whom we encounter
as we transcend the world, this work actually encourages spiritual self-activation. It
rises
upward from below. For the symbolists there was redemption, but no redeemer - at least not one who descended from on high. Instead, there was a saviour who showed the true path on earth, one who knew by his suffering that there was a higher purpose: the artist himself. In 1920 Schwabe attempted to portray this worldly redeemer

(fig. 4). With one foot on a thorn and his head in the clouds, the artist goes on his way, his lyre marking him out as a poet. His words alone bring him to heaven. Schwabe himself also tread the path of imagination. In the *Madonna with liles* he revealed that path to the viewer: thanks to the artist, heaven opens.
fig. 1
Blue and white Japanese dish with scenes from a pottery, The Hague, Museum Mesdag
‘A large Japanese blue and white dish depicting a porcelain factory’

Menno Fitski

The Museum Mesdag collection contains an unusual Japanese porcelain dish (fig. 1). It is decorated in under-glaze blue with nine scenes depicting various stages in the manufacture of porcelain. Dishes dealing with this subject are extremely rare and only one other, virtually identical, example is known, housed in Arita itself.

The dish is first mentioned in the catalogue compiled in 1903, when Hendrik Willem Mesdag presented his collections to the nation and his museum passed into the hands of the state. How the dish came into Mesdag's possession is still not known. In 1887 he had built a museum to house his collection of paintings, and - in accordance with contemporary taste - he sought out art objects with which to decorate the rooms. These included a substantial number of oriental pieces, acquired in large part from the dealer E.J. van Wisselingh of The Hague. Among them were large quantities of Persian metalwork, Chinese and Japanese bronzes, and Satsuma stoneware, most of which can still be seen in the Museum Mesdag today. Unfortunately, the dish is not mentioned in the invoices which survive for many of these purchases.

The dish cannot be dated by the mark on the foot-ring: it consists of four characters in seal script within a double rectangle, and the correct interpretation is unclear. Fortunately, the decoration on the front and back is more telling. On the back, the foot-ring is encircled by a frieze with a comb motif inside two double lines above a band of linked spiral motifs. Above this is a continuous row of cranes, shown flying over waves. A continuous motif such as this and painted in this manner dates the dish to the 19th century. The decoration on the front, in which no distinction is made between border and centre, also points in this direction. A further indication can be found in the way in which the figure in the rain is depicted in scene 3 (fig. 3). It is remarkable how closely the style here resembles that of Ukiyo-e prints, and in particular the later manner of Hiroshige. The similarity of this figure to the one in the well-known print Ōhashi Atake no yūdachi of 1857 is striking. It is not impossible that the decorator drew his inspiration from such prints, or had even worked in the field. On the basis of these features, the dish can be dated plausibly to the third quarter of the 19th century.

This rare piece has an extraordinary documentary value, as there is little visual material relating to porcelain manufacturing in the 19th century. One source is the Nihon sankai meisan zue (‘Illustrated survey of famous products from all Japan’), originally published in 1799. Part five, Hizen Imari yakimono (‘Imari porcelain from Hizen’), describes porcelain production in Arita with the aid of several woodcuts. These illustrations provide an interesting comparison with the dish under discussion.

1 Philippe Zilleken, Museum Mesdag: Catalogus der schilderijen, teekeningen, etsen en kunstvoorwerpen, The Hague 1905, p. 111, no. 453. The title of this article is taken from the description in the catalogue.
2 See, for example, Catalogue of the Van Gogh Museum's collection of Japanese prints, Amsterdam 1991, nos. 94 and 95. As it happens, this is one of the prints after which Vincent van Gogh painted a copy.
It is safe to assume, incidentally, that the scenes illustrate the production process accurately: the style is clearly documentary, with careful attention being paid to how the equipment is shown. When portraying these scenes the decorator in Arita did not need to use his imagination; he had only to record his everyday surroundings. As might be expected, the depiction of his daily place of work - the decorators' workshop shown in the centre - is rich in information and largely corresponds to what is
known about the organisation of a pottery. This exactitude stands in sharp contrast to the illustration in the *Nihon sankai meisan zue* which incorrectly depicts a potter at his wheel. He is shown sitting cross-legged, like a tailor, whereas it is known that Arita potters traditionally sat on a raised seat and worked the wheel with their feet, as shown in the central scene of the Mesdag dish (fig. 6). In short, this piece is a finely designed snapshot from the history of porcelain manufacturing, which takes us back over 150 years to the world of a community of potters in southern Japan.

**Scenes from a pottery**

The dish is bordered by eight scenes, each contained in geometric, bracket-shaped cartouches. Moving anti-clockwise, they illustrate the porcelain-making process in a more or less chronological fashion. In the centre the main scene is framed within a rectangle. The little space not taken up by these nine illustrations is filled with a frogspawn-motif.

Starting at the right (fig. 2), we see the source of the stone used to make the porcelain, the Izumiyama quarry. Located just outside Arita, today it is completely exhausted; a deep pit has been created where there once was a mountain, and the stone now extracted is used solely for roof tiles and drainpipes. In the hills around the quarry are numerous hollows, dug in search of the highest quality stone. This was necessary because the stone's characteristics varied a good

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4 See *Arita-chô rekishi minzoku shiryôkan. Arita-yaki sankôkan kenkyû kiyo* 5, Arita 1997, pp. 14-19, hereafter *Kenkû kiyo* 5. Here the author concludes that the central scene in fact corresponds to evidence from excavations of similar workshops; for example, the floor in the middle was usually flanked by raised areas used by the decorators.
deal. In the stone of volcanic origin, for example, which consisted mainly of quartz and mica, weathering and hydrothermal action had raised the initially low level of kaolinite and reduced that of quartz. These processes varied naturally from location to location, and over the years there was keen competition to secure the best sources. Stone from Izumiyama was not mixed with that from other quarries, but the different variants from sites within the quarry were combined to obtain the best clay for a particular purpose.

Various pieces of equipment can be seen in the depiction of Izumiyama. One of the four figures carries a tsuruhashi, a pick for hewing stone. The other three transport the stone with a kind of yoke consisting of two wicker baskets hung from a pole, known in Arita as a tengonbō or òko. The beast of burden shown, probably a horse, brings the stone the rest of the way to the manufactory. Behind them, encircled by a wooden palisade, are the buildings and guardhouse of the overseer, who was appointed by the han.

The stone was crushed either by hand using a hammer or, as here, by a water-driven pounder (fig. 3). These were known as kara usu or mizu usu. The mechanism was simple but effective: the tank at the back of the horizontal beam filled with water until the weight tilted the whole; the tank emptied itself and the metal-covered pounder at the other end fell onto the box of stone. Good use was made of the many streams in the area and there were said to be over a hundred of these pounders in and around Arita. As in the other scenes, the attention to detail here is remarkable. The realistic depiction of the roof over the pounder, the clothing of the figure with his rain hat, and the baskets covered with sedge provide valuable information about everyday life in Japan at this period.

The powder thus obtained (hatarikona) was then put in a suspension to purify the clay and separate the finer mica and kaolinite particles from heavier constituents such as quartz. As the water moved from one trough to another, the coarser particles were precipitated, while the smaller ones remain in suspension. Scene 4 (fig. 4) shows how the water from the first rectangular tank ran into a narrow channel, from which the clay solution was then removed with a choppage and put through a sieve (shiino)

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7 The following information regarding the equipment used is largely derived from Yukio Suzuta's article ‘Shokunin zukushizu ni miru dōgu,’ *Shizen to Bunka* (Autumn 1982) and other material he generously made available to me. I am much indebted to him.

8 In pre-modern Japan, the country was divided into fiefs or han with a daimyō as the liege lord.

9 Suzuta, op. cit. (note 7), p. 16.

10 Impey, op. cit. (note 5), p. 36.
fig. 3
Detail: stone-grinding with the aid of a water-driven pounder

fig. 4
Detail: purification of the clay
before ending up in the last tank. ¹¹ To the right at the back are two jars used to store clay solution or glaze, also seen - with stirrer - in scene 7 (fig. 7). Hanging from a beam are two kuwa, hoes used for raking up the clay.

To the right, scene 5 (fig. 5) shows the clay being dried in big stone troughs (oro). When sufficiently dry, it was laid out on absorbent tiles. Porcelain clay made of Izumiyama stone had to be left to rest for about two years before it could be used.¹²

In the left background a curious scene takes place: a man appears to be emptying a bucket over the kiln. The Nihon sankai meisan zue shows a similar scene, and remarks that the dried clay was spread over the kiln so that the heat would make the clay softer. It was then scraped off, mixed with pure water and kneaded into balls.¹³ Brinkley confirms this practice in his work of 1901: ‘The clay is finally made more consistent by putting it for a time on the warm ovens.’¹⁴

Biscuit firing took place at Arita from at least the 19th century, and probably earlier.¹⁵ Before being decorated, the greenware was fired at about 950°C. Here we clearly see the raised floor on which the pieces will be fired. The space in front, where the long planks are being carried into the kiln, is where the fire will be lit. This shows that the kiln's entrance and exit also had to serve as the stokehole. Through the door we can see the plates placed on to chin, special stands that made it possible to arrange the pieces at different heights and so make better use of the kiln's limited

¹¹ The two large rectangular tanks are known as gaisô (‘outer tank’), the narrow ones in between as chûsô (‘middle tank’). Unfortunately, no such installation has yet been excavated at Arita; see Kenkyû kîyo 5, cit. (note 4), pp. 12-14, for a description of the excavation of a similar complex at the Senoue kiln near Nankan in the Kumamoto prefecture, consisting, however, of a rectangular chûsô, with an oval gaisô on either side.
¹³ Ibid., pp. 17-18. Suzuta also states that this task was usually done by women, although it is a man who is depicted on the dish. In fact, the entire process seems rather puzzling, as it would have increased the risk of dirt getting into the clay although the end product desired was white porcelain.
¹⁴ Brinkley, op. cit. (note 6), p. 67.
¹⁵ It is generally assumed that Arita porcelain was biscuit fired from as early as the end of the 17th century, but this has not been confirmed by archaeological evidence. Hardly any biscuit shards have been found near the kilns, although when the fragile greenware was fired there must have been numerous breakages.
space. Beside the kiln are several bowls and a small *rokuro* or wheel, which was used for finishing off the pieces before firing. Above, the drying troughs are racks (*tonpan*) laden with drying greenware.

The central cartouche depicts the main workshop, the heart of the factory (fig. 6). It is a busy scene: the potter's wheel spins, pigments are ground, and decorators, merchants and administrators come and go. Particularly striking - in addition, once again, to the precision of detail - is the illustration's homely atmosphere. An old woman enters with a pile of cups and a kettle of tea; on the ground

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16 In the 17th century the *tochin* was not much higher than ten centimeters; in the course of time, however, it increased in height, as this scene shows. Kōji Ōhashi, *Hizen tōki* (Kōkogaku raiburaii 55) Tokyo 1993, pp. 97-98.
two dogs sleep amicably side by side; and pairs of straw sandals can be seen lying where the merchants on the raised platform have left them. It all looks rather pleasant.

This scene in particular provides a great deal of information about the day-to-day routine in the manufactory. On the raised platform to the right we see two merchants inspecting the goods on offer: the one on the left opens a lidded bowl, while the one on the right holds a larger vessel. Around them various wares are set out on display: bowls, plates, a flask, a sake bottle, all with the forms and decorations one would expect in the mid-19th century, such as the bowl with the ‘fishnet pattern.’ In front of them sits an employee, writing in what appears to be a notebook, and at the back of the room, next to a wooden chest marked shoko (library), sits a man who is probably the kamayaki or proprietor. He is seated behind a brazier with his pipe to the left, and his own tea-making set in a niche beside the book chest; behind him part of the tokoname is visible.

In this illustration we also see various further stages in the manufacturing process. First, at the left, the clay is kneaded; to homogenise the clay and drive out the air, this needed to be carried out over an extended period of time. Here the man is working according to the so-called ‘chrysanthemum method,’ in which the lump of clay is kneaded in spiraling motions.

Behind him are two figures at the kerokuro or potter's wheel, driven round clockwise with the left foot.

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17 There is a bowl with this pattern, for example, in the Kyushu Ceramic Museum; see Shibata korekushon IV, Arita 1995, p. 220, no. 436. Seen frequently on 17th-century Arita blue and white porcelain for the domestic market, this pattern again became popular in the 19th century; see Kôji Ōhashi, Ko-Imari no moyô, Tokyo 1994, pp. 270-71.
18 Workshops such as these were usually located in the home of the owner; see Kenkyû kiyo 5, cit. (note 4), p. 17.
19 The table on which this was done is known as a tsuchimomidai or shimomidai.
20 See Wilson, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 52-53.
21 Literally ‘kickwheel,’ also known as a ‘Kyushu kickwheel.’
fig. 7
Detail: glazing the bowls

fig. 8
Detail: debarking the firewood
This type of wheel was probably introduced to Japan from Korea at the end of the 16th century, a period when many ceramic techniques arrived from the mainland.\textsuperscript{22} The platform of the wheel is at about the same height as the seat, so that it could be turned with the upper body leaning forwards. After the clay was centered using both hands, a portion was worked upwards to form the bowl, as the figure on the right demonstrates. The man on the left works his bowl with a \textit{hera}, a curved wooden spatula used for shaping the inside surface.\textsuperscript{23}

At the front right bowls are being made with the help of a mould: the clay was pressed down over a form with a wooden spatula, after which the foot-ring was attached. This method produced a very regular shape, and the inner surface could be decorated with relief patterns simply by incising the wooden form. To the left sit the decorators, their brush-cases at their sides: they are turned towards the windows to make the most of the light. Their task was to paint the porcelain in cobalt blue before glazing. The woman on the left at the back is grinding cobalt oxide in a stone mortar.

After being decorated the pieces were glazed, producing the typical underglaze blue. The illustration (fig. 7) shows a child using both hands to turn a \textit{toibôki} round in a bowl to remove dust. The woman in the centre, beautifully depicted dressed in an apron, with a headcloth and bands holding up her sleeves, kneels on a mat as she dips the bowls in a vat of glaze. The decorations of the bowls beside her and above on the drying rack are not visible; they have already been glazed.\textsuperscript{24} In Arita porcelain was glazed with a mixture of wood ash and porcelain stone, a glaze that was also used on Korean stoneware, where it originated.\textsuperscript{25}

The two women in figure 8 bend over as they work with a debarker. The most suitable fuel for the kilns was pinewood, but it was not available in large quantities, and in practice other softwoods were often used. Obtaining wood was a problem in this area of Japan; as early as 1637 an edict refers to deforestation caused by increasing consumption. The bark was removed in order to reduce the amount of ash created in the kiln during firing. It is also possible that it was used in the production of glaze. In Arita, for example, the ash of the bark of the Isu tree (\textit{Distylicum racemosum}) was generally used to make glaze.\textsuperscript{26}

In another scene (fig. 9) we see part of the kiln or \textit{noborigama}. This name, literally ‘climbing kiln,’ derives from the fact that it was built in steps against a hill. In the early 19th century it usually had about 18 chambers, six of which are shown here. They are sheltered by a roof of reeds or straw. The doors of the ovens are bricked up, except for a hole through which firewood could be thrown. To the right there is another opening, used to judge the temperature by the colour of the glowing porcelain. Firing began at the bottom, in the first chamber; when the temperature reached 850°C the firing of the second chamber began. Each chamber was connected to the previous one through openings at the bottom of the wall; this allowed for the circulation of hot air, ensuring that the heat was evenly distributed.\textsuperscript{27} It was also essential for the

\textsuperscript{22} Impey, op. cit. (note 5), p. 36.
\textsuperscript{23} The \textit{hera} used here is called a \textit{nubebera} or \textit{nobebera}, from \textit{noberu}, ‘to stretch.’ Because of its shape it is also sometimes called an \textit{ushinoshita} or ‘ox tongue.’
\textsuperscript{24} The milky glaze only became transparent after firing.
\textsuperscript{25} Impey, op. cit. (note 5), p. 38, and Wilson op. cit. (note 5), pp. 121-23, 130.
\textsuperscript{26} Wilson, op. cit. (note 5), p. 130, and Brinkley, op. cit. (note 6), p. 70.
\textsuperscript{27} See Impey, op. cit. (note 5), pp. 40-41 for a more detailed account.
success of the underglaze blue that firing take place under the extraction of oxygen. To achieve this, fresh wood had to be thrown onto the fire regularly; in the first stage of combustion the fresh wood consumed oxygen, thus removing it from the surrounding areas. When the chamber reached the required temperature (1280°C), the stokehole was closed in order to maintain the reduced atmosphere. Once the whole kiln had been fired, it was left to cool down for several days. It was important that the temperature rise and fall slowly, in order to prevent damage being caused by sudden cooling.

Here we see wooden blocks being thrown into the kiln through the stokehole. A child stands by the woodpile, ready to hand over the next block, and the overseer quietly smokes his pipe. At the bottom left one can catch a glimpse of how the wood was transported.
fig. 9
Detail: the kiln

fig. 10
Detail: goods being stored in the warehouse
In the last scene (fig. 10) the finished products are brought into the warehouse. The bearer moves towards the doorway carrying two baskets of bowls. Inside a man appears to be carrying out a final inspection. Double-gourd bottles and large pots are visible behind him.

**A craftsman's statement?**

It is extraordinary how the decorator has managed to cover so many aspects of porcelain manufacturing in just nine scenes. He has given us a remarkably detailed picture of the process, although not, of course, an all-embracing one. Overglaze decoration in colour, for example, is not shown. It is almost as if the dish has been limited to a kind of self-reference, to telling the story of its own genesis. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of information and we are given a good insight into the daily routine at the pottery. Beyond this informative content, however, it is the affection with which the painter has depicted his subject that makes this dish so appealing.

As mentioned above, one other example of this dish is known, in the museum in Arita. It is interesting note its few minor differences from the Mesdag dish. On the dish in Arita the block of wood is thrown into the kiln with the left hand; on the dish in The Hague with the right. On the latter the administrator writes with a brush, whereas on the Arita example he rubs an ink stick on an inkstone. But the most striking difference is in the central scene: in the Arita example a small boy stands beside the raised platform where the decorators are seen working (fig. 11). He appears to be talking to an elderly gentleman wearing glasses, who is seated at the end of the row and may be assumed to be the senior craftsman. Surprisingly, on the Mesdag dish the place of the old man has been taken by the man who once sat at his left. Could it be that he has surrendered his place to the new generation? In any event it is very tempting to date the Mesdag dish a few months later than the Arita example on the grounds of this transposition.

![fig. 11](image)

Blue and white Japanese dish with scenes from a pottery, Arita, Arita Ceramic Museum
Documentation

Catalogue of acquisitions: paintings, drawings and sculpture
January 1997-July 1998

This catalogue contains all paintings and drawings acquired by the Van Gogh Museum from January 1997 to July 1998. Each work has an inventory number made up as follows: the first letter stands for the technique (s = painting, d = drawing, v = sculpture); this is followed by a reference number and then by a capital letter (B = loan, N = State of the Netherlands, S = Van Gogh Museum [after 1 July 1994], V = Vincent van Gogh Foundation) and the year of acquisition.

Paintings

Bilders, Gerard
Dutch, 1838-1865

Edge of the wood
Oil on panel, 35 × 46 cm
s 462 S/1997

Gerard Bilders was one of the first Dutch artists who, under the influence of the painters of the School of Barbizon, strove for greater realism and sobriety in their depictions of nature. Thanks partly to the views expressed in his letters, which were published posthumously, he is now regarded as a pioneer of the Hague School. Most of the artists belonging to this group focused on the Dutch landscape. The greater part of the collection in the Museum Mesdag in The Hague, which is managed by the Van Gogh Museum, is devoted to the work of these French and Dutch landscapists.

The Mesdag collection houses two paintings by Gerard's father, Johannes Bilders (1811-1890), and his second wife, Maria Bilders-van Bosse (1837-1900). Gerard, who died of tuberculosis at an early age, sold few paintings in his lifetime, and left only a modest oeuvre. Nonetheless, his studio pieces and studies in oil all bear particularly effective witness to his ideas.

Edge of the wood cannot be dated with any certainty, but was probably painted at the end of the 1850s, when Bilders depicted a number of similar landscape motifs.
Executed without embellishment, the work gives a realistic impression of a sunny day. Due to the loose brushstroke, the emphasis lies not so much on detail as on the nuances of colour and the illusion of sparkling sunlight, an effect that can be clearly observed in the rendering of the fence.

**Provenance** Christie's (Amsterdam), 19 February 1997, lot 224; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum for the Museum Mesdag (1997).
Breitner, George Hendrik  
Dutch, 1857-1923

Portrait of a young girl c. 1907  
Oil on panel, 28 × 20.9 cm  
s 485 S/1997

Portrait of a young girl c. 1907  
Oil on panel, 27.7 × 20 cm  
s 486 S/1997

These two portraits by G.H. Breitner were donated to the Van Gogh Museum. Thanks to this double gift, in addition to two watercolours by Breitner, the museum now possesses two of his oils. The portraits show Breitner's younger nieces: A.M.S. van Baerle and her sister. Both were painted in around 1907, when the sisters were roughly 8 and 12 years old. We see Breitner's characteristically loose brushstroke, a broad
touch which often gives little scope to detail. The sisters are shown from the chest upwards. The sitting took place in the Van Baerle family home in Rotterdam rather than in the artist's studio; this displeased Breitner greatly, as the lighting in the house was poor. It is also notable that the subjects have been endowed with almost no sense of personality - quite uncharacteristic for Breitner's work; perhaps this has something to do with the girls' youth. Both figures are somewhat static: rather than being absorbed in some game or activity, they look towards the spectator. One of the girls is seated on a chair of indistinct shape; she wears a black hat with a frivolous red ribbon, which gives her an elegant air. The other portrait shows only the sitter's head and shoulders; here it is even more difficult to distinguish between background, clothing and hair. This accentuates the face and the girl's slight blush.

**Provenance** On loan from the subject, the niece of G.H. Breitner since 1992; donated to the Van Gogh Museum (1997).

**Gogh, Vincent van**  
**Dutch, 1853-1890**

‘La berceuse’ (Portrait of Madame Roulin) 1889  
Oil on canvas, 92 × 72.5  
s 168 B/1997

The Van Gogh Museum has received Van Gogh's *La berceuse* on loan from the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. This canvas is inextricably linked with Vincent's *Sunflowers*, and has been given a place next to that undisputed masterpiece. The loan is part of an exchange: *La berceuse* - donated by V.W. van Gogh to the Stedelijk in 1945 as thanks for its good care of the family collection during the Second World War - will be replaced by Van Gogh's *Entrance to a quarry*, also painted in 1889.

From the beginning of his career Vincent had a pronounced predilection for figure painting. In Aries, however, where models were even harder to
Vincent van Gogh

‘La berceuse’ (Portrait of Madame Roulin) 1889
come by than before, there was little opportunity for portraiture. His greatest supplier of models eventually proved to be the family of the forty-seven-year-old Joseph Roulin, who looked after the mails as an entre-posteur des postes at the local railway station. As the many portraits of her testify, Vincent's favourite sitter was Roulin's wife, Augustine-Alix Pellicot (1851-1930). The couple had married on 31 August 1868; she was ten years her husband's junior.

Madame Roulin, who had given birth to a daughter in the summer of 1888, was also the sitter for the painting now known as La berceuse - ‘our lullaby, or the woman cradling,’ as Van Gogh himself put it [745/57 1a]. The artist eventually made five versions of this work; according to his biographer, Jan Hulsker, the canvas from the Stedelijk Museum is the second to last. The first version was painted in December 1888, and its four successors were probably created in January and February of the following year. Van Gogh wanted the portrait of Augustine Roulin holding the cords of the cradle to constitute a general depiction of motherhood, a desire probably influenced by the views of the French historian Jules Michelet expressed in his La femme (1858). To use Michelet's words, we see her here as the epitome of the ‘true wife and mother; she shines a radiance over everything, a harmonious force which, from the small circle of the family, may cause greater circles to spread over society! She is a religion of benevolence, of civilisation.’

Mother Roulin, ‘diese Paraphrase von Rundlichkeiten,’ as the art historian Hans Tietze once aptly put it, also assumed great personal significance for Van Gogh after his discharge from hospital in early January. When ill, he had seen the living room in the house where he was born in Zundert in his dreams; and, as he informed Theo in a letter at the end of that month, he was still being haunted by ‘the oldest memories,’ and was always recalling the time when there had been nothing more than ‘Mother and me’ [744/573]. Little knowledge of psychology is needed to link these dreams with the newest versions of La berceuse. For a sick man hankering so strongly after security, the image of a maternal figure at the cradle was comforting indeed.

This interpretation is further reinforced by Van Gogh's wish, expressed later, that La berceuse be flanked by two of his still lifes with sunflowers. He even drew a sketch of this unrealised triptych for his brother, remarking somewhat strikingly that he envisaged it for ‘the rear bulkhead of the cabin of a boat,’ where it would provide the comfort of a Stella
Maris for poor fishermen at sea. This idea was inspired by Pierre Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande*, which describes statues of the Madonna on board fishing vessels. Posies of artificial flowers were laid at their feet, Loti wrote, and these bouquets gave Van Gogh the idea of positioning his sunflowers as wings to *La berceuse*. This explains Van Gogh's later written reference to his still lifes as symbols of ‘thanksgiving’ - a significance gained only when seen in juxtaposition with *La berceuse*. By presenting this work from the Stedelijk Museum next to *Sunflowers* in the Van Gogh Museum, another of Van Gogh's original intentions can now be realised.

**Provenance**  
Johanna van Gogh-Bonger; Ir. V.W. van Gogh; on loan to the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (1927-30); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, gift of Ir. V.W. van Gogh (1945); on loan to the Van Gogh Museum (1997).

**Literature**  

**Mancini, Antonio**  
**Italian**, 1852-1930

Woman with a green vase c. 1895  
Oil on canvas, 88 ×63 cm  
Signed in black at top left: *A Mancini*  
s 488 S/1998

After nearly a century, this painting by Antonio Mancini has now returned to the collection of Hendrik Willem Mesdag. The Museum Mesdag in
The Hague already contained twelve paintings and three pastels by Mancini. In total, however, Mesdag must have owned about a hundred and fifty works by this artist; from 1885 he had acted as the latter's patron, and continued to do so until the early years of the following century.

While a number of these works eventually came into the possession of the heirs of Mesdag and his wife, the painter also sold Mancini's work - as this painting of a *Woman with a green vase* clearly testifies. In 1899 it was exhibited at a relatively minor showing of seventeen works by Mancini in Dordrecht; its stated owner was ‘de heer H.W. Mesdag.’ But by the time of the later and far larger Mancini exhibition - which was held in The Hague at Pulchri Studio in 1902, and where 47 of the artist's works were shown - the owner had become the gallery Maison Artz. After this, the painting passed into private hands once again.

*Woman with a green vase* was probably painted in the 1890s, when Mancini had gained a certain reputation and painted portraits on commission. In periods when no work was at hand, he worked from female models, whom he usually set in compositions that included flowers and other objects. Here, however, we see only a large vase with a few flowers. The green of the vase predominates, and complements the red of the shawl the Italian woman wears round her shoulders. The background is plain, and only partly finished; the painter may have intended to add other objects to the figure's left.

In his earliest works, Mancini's painting technique was sparing and smooth; later, as we see here, the paint was applied more thickly and the brushwork became sketchier. It was precisely this sketchiness and the glimpse it afforded of the artist's hand that appealed to Mesdag, himself a painter. The strong chiaroscuro effects, particularly in the woman's face, betray the influence of Caravaggio and Rembrandt, painters Mancini studied and whose work he much admired.

The surface of the canvas displays traces of a grid, a method Mancini himself reported he had used since 1883, and which involved placing two identical frames in front of his model and against his canvas, each strung with horizontal, vertical and diagonal cords. With this aid he was able to reproduce *il vero*: reality. That the device left marks in the paint plainly did not trouble him.


Anthon van Rappard visited his friend and colleague Vincent van Gogh twice during the latter's stay in Nuenen. Each short visit - the first of which took place in May 1884, and the second five months later - made a welcome change for Van Gogh, whose life in the village was isolated, both artistically and otherwise. Each time, Van Rappard stayed for over a week, and from Vincent's letters to his brother we can deduce that the two artists got out and about quite a lot, seeking motifs such as ‘weavers and all kinds of lovely things outside’ [450/369]. The precise number of paintings Van Rappard made in Nuenen is uncertain. Two, in any case, are known from his first visit: a *Old woman at the spinning wheel* and this *Weaver*.

In many respects, both the former picture - now in the Centraal Museum in Utrecht - and this painting bear a resemblance to the work of Van Gogh. The composition, colours and dramatic contrast of light and dark in Van Rappard's *Weaver* are strongly reminiscent of Van Gogh's own *Weaver with a view of the Nuenen tower through a window* (Munich, Neue Pinakothek). The only really obvious difference between the two lies in the man himself: as a rule, Vincent's weavers seem tired and sombre, while the figure in Van Rappard's painting appears peaceful and contented.

Van Gogh told Theo he thought Van Rappard's weaver ‘very good’ [450/369]. This pronouncement was probably due to the dark palette used in the painting, which was unusual in Van Rappard's oeuvre at this time. Vincent disapproved of his friend's customary use of light colours, but noted that ‘the weaver [...] was an exception’ [451/R50].
Provenance Wilhelmina Elisabeth van Rappard, Hilversum (1931); P. Leffelaar, Laren; Kunsthandel Van Lier, Blaricum (c. 1963); P. Ter Berg, Laren, (c. 1965-97); Sotheby's (Amsterdam), 1 December 1997, lot 508; purchased by the Vincent van Gogh Foundation (1997).


Ribot, Théodule
French, 1823-1891

Still life with eggs
Oil on canvas, 52.8 × 92.5 cm
Signed at lower left: t. Ribot
s 463 S/1997

Ribot's career is poorly documented. He rarely dated his pictures, and since he left few papers or letters, it is difficult to reconstruct his artistic progress. His importance among realist painters in Paris is, however, suggested by his contacts with numerous artists including Fantin-Latour, Bonvin and Vollon. Nonetheless, as Gabriel Weisberg writes in his essay on Ribot in this volume of the Van Gogh Museum Journal (pp. 76-87), he was jealous of his independence and remained aloof from any particular artistic grouping.

Ribot seems to have taken up still-life painting in the 1860s. Although these works are now widely admired, they attracted little attention during the artist's lifetime and seem only to have been known to a relatively small circle of his family and friends. It is not clear how many still lifes he produced or whether any pattern of development can be traced in his paintings in this genre. As Weisberg indicates, the situation is further complicated by the fact that Ribot's son Germain (1845-1893) and daughter Louise (1857-1916) were also competent still-life painters, and some of their works may have become confused with those of their father.

Like many of Ribot's works, Still life with eggs is undated. It may have been painted during the 1860s, but a later date is also possible. The provenance is also difficult to establish as it is clouded by the existence of several, very similar versions of this subject by the same artist. The first seemingly certain reference to the present picture is in the catalogue of the sale of works belonging to Ribot's widow in 1896. Although the dimensions given for the work entitled Les oeufs sur le plat differ slightly from the Amsterdam picture, the reproduction in the catalogue confirms that this was indeed the work acquired by the Van Gogh Museum. It is not clear whether a work
of the same title shown at the 1892 retrospective of Ribot's work was also the same painting or another version.

The austerity of this newly-acquired painting is typical of Ribot's work. A cabbage, some cherries, a plate of eggs, a jug and a large earthenware vessel are grouped together as if to suggest the ingredients of a simple, peasant meal. Detail is honed away by the harsh light, which instead draws our attention to the differing textures and shapes within the composition. The soft, wilting leaves of the vegetable are set against the dry, unglazed surfaces of the ceramic, which in turn contrast with the glistening, oil-covered eggs.

Working with only a narrow range of colours Ribot depicts these objects with unrelenting realism. Yet, for all its directness, the painting has a quiet monumentality which, enhanced by the stark contrasts of light and shade, lifts it above the mere recording of external appearances. The still, contemplative mood and the humble subject perhaps stem from Ribot's interest in the Spanish masters of the 17th century. His devotion to the work of artists such as Ribera and Velázquez was commented upon by contemporary critics, and he here evokes the still life in one of the latter's most famous early works, *Old woman cooking eggs* (Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland).


**Literature** Vente aux enchères de tableaux, études, aquarelles et dessins par Théodule Ribot, Paris (Hôtel Drouot), 30 May 1896, no. 23; Gabriel P. Weisberg (with William S. Talbot), exhib. cat. Chardin and the still-life tradition in France, Cleveland (Cleveland Museum of Art) 1979, no. 25, pp. 74-76; exhib. cat. The Realist tradition: French painting and drawing, 1830-1900, Cleveland (Cleveland Museum of Art), Brooklyn, NY (The Brooklyn Museum), St Louis (St Louis Art Museum) & Glasgow (Glasgow Art Gallery), 1980-82, p. 153 (for a discussion of a similar composition now in the Musée de Senlis).

**Seurat, Georges**

**French, 1859-1891**

The Seine at Courbevoie

Oil on panel, 15.5 × 24.5 cm

s 489 S/1998

*The Seine at Courbevoie* probably dates from 1883 or 1884. The view seems to have been taken from the island of La Grande Jatte, looking southwest across the Seine to the suburb of Courbevoie. In the background, the gently sloping diagonal of the far river bank leads to an iron bridge, cut off at the extreme left of the composition. A block of tall villas is silhouetted against the sky, while in the foreground a few strokes of paint indicate the form of a figure in a boat. Although this study does not relate directly to a finished painting, a similar view from a slightly different angle reappears in Seurat's well-known *Bridge at Courbevoie*, 1886-87 (London, Courtauld Institute Galleries).
At first glance *The Seine at Courbevoie* seems like a spontaneous, almost casual study. However, in spite of its freedom, there is ample evidence of the artist's rigorous scrutiny of his subject as he captures the glare of the evening light, the dappled reflections on the river, and the different textures in the embankment and the foliage beyond. There are signs, too, of the systematic brushwork which, refined and developed in his larger canvases, would eventually become be known as neo-impressionism. The severe, insistent geometry of the composition is also one of the artists's trademarks, but it is the carefully studied combinations of colour which are the most striking feature of this work. Writing about this picture in the catalogue of the 1991-92 Seurat retrospective, Robert Herbert noted how the colours 'tell a surprising amount about the site [...] If we examine just the two inches occupied by the bridge and its immediate surroundings, we will appreciate the numerous decisions that entered into such an apparently elemental study. The top edge of the huge building is made of horizontal strokes of grayish blue, but its walls are vertical streaks, mostly blended, of purplish blue and yellowish green. Crossing through the brightly colored wedge to the right, the horizontal stitching of light yellow above center and along the top of the embankment picks out walls or roadways' (Herbert, 1991-92, p. 143).
Théodule Ribot
Still life with eggs
Georges Seurat
The Seine at Courbevoie
Seurat painted directly on to the panel, exploiting the grain for its textural effects and using the warm brown of the wood as an active part of the colour scheme. Throughout his career he frequently painted on such small panels. In the Seurat literature they are sometimes referred to as cigar-box lids, but in fact they were probably good quality artists' panels that were intended to fit inside the lid of an outdoor painting box. Seurat himself referred to these studies as *croquetons*, an invented term which perhaps derives from *croquis*, the academic term for a small, rapid sketch. He often used these panels for working out of doors, painting wet-into-wet to capture a motif in a single session.

With its vigorous touch and bold colour *The Seine at Courbevoie* suggests that Seurat was familiar with the work of Monet and the impressionists; he later said that he admired the ‘intuition’ of Monet and Renoir, and he had certainly had the opportunity to study their paintings in exhibitions in Paris. Yet although he may have borrowed elements of his style from impressionism, there is a degree of artifice in the technique and design of this and other studies which reveals his allegiance to an older, idealising tradition in French art. The careful control of the colour, the rhythmic brushwork and the taut sense of design are all signs of Seurat's determination to impose unity on the diversity of nature.

After Seurat's death *The Seine at Courbevoie* passed to the artist's brother and has subsequently been in several private collections in France. The picture was shown in a number of early exhibitions, including the homage to Seurat organised after his premature death by his artist friends at the Indépendents (1892), and at the Revue Blanche (1900). Seurat also painted a quick sketch on the other side of the panel; in 1932 the panel was divided into two and the study formerly on the reverse, entitled *Paysage rose*, is now in the Musée d'Orsay.

The acquisition of this small but intense work not only broadens the range of the Van Gogh Museum's collection but also adds an important new point of reference for the understanding of Van Gogh's art. His Paris period (1886-88) coincided with Seurat's emergence as one of the leading figures of the avant garde. Vincent recognised this role, later describing Seurat as ‘undoubtedly’ the leader of the artists of the ‘Petit Boulevard,’ his own term for the new wave of younger artists who were testing the boundaries of naturalism [623/500]. They met for the first time in November 1887, at a restaurant in the Avenue de Clichy where Van Gogh was showing some of his works. Shortly afterwards, Seurat, Van Gogh and Signac exhibited their works together in the rehearsal rooms of the Théâtre Libre d'Antoine in the rue Blanche.

According to Seurat, his acquaintance with Van Gogh did not develop into a close friendship. Yet Seurat's influence, either direct or indirect, is easily traced in Vincent's work from these years. On his painting excursions to the northwest suburbs of Paris he painted the same stretches of river that Seurat had earlier made his own in and around Asnières and the Ile de la Grande Jatte. *The Seine at Courbevoie*, depicts the kind of site Van Gogh painted on several occasions; a similar motif of tall villas beside a bridge appears in one of his paintings of 1887, *The Seine with the Pont de Clichy* F 303 JH 1323). The colour combinations of blues, yellows and greens in the Seurat study and the vigorous pointillist touch are also interesting to compare with several of Van Gogh's Paris period pictures in the Van Gogh Museum.

Van Gogh's last act before leaving Paris for Arles in February 1888 was to spend some hours with Theo in Seurat's studio, where he experienced 'a fresh revelation
of colour.’ The visit and the works he saw seem to have impressed Van Gogh deeply. He referred to Seurat on numerous occasions in his letters to Theo from Arles, and more than once he expressed his wish to acquire a work by Seurat by exchange: ‘It would be a good thing to have a painted study of his. Well, I’m working hard, hoping that we can do something with things of this kind’ [596/474]. Ultimately, the rigour of the neo-impressionist method was incompatible with Van Gogh's artistic personality. Nonetheless, he retained a particular admiration for Seurat's colour: ‘I often think of his method, though I do not follow it at all; but he is an original colorist, and Signac, too, though to a different degree; their stippling is a new discovery, and at all events I like them very much’ [687/539].

Provenance After Seurat's death in 1891 an inventory was made of the contents of his studio and the wooden panels were given a number on the reverse (no. 86); this inventory number is still visible on the study, which was originally on the reverse (see above); inherited by Seurat's brother, Emile Seurat, and in his possession until at least 1892; Alexandre Natanson, Paris (1929); Hôtel Drouot (Paris), 16 May 1929, lot 105; Georges Lévy, Paris (1932); Hôtel Drouot (Paris), 17 November 1932, lot 106; Victor Bossuat, Paris; private collection; Galerie Hopkins Thomas, Paris; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum, with the support of the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the Vereniging Rembrandt (1998).


Drawings

Dupré, Jules
French, 1811-1889

Cattle watering c. 1846
Watercolour, 25.5 × 36.5 cm
Signed at lower left: Jules Dupré
d 1086 S/1997

In 1845, after having worked in Barbizon during 1843, Jules Dupré and Théodore Rousseau established themselves in L'Isle-Adam. In 1847 the so-called Groupe de L'Isle-Adam came into being; it included Daumier, Daubigny, Corot, Laveille and Flers. This watercolour dates from this period. Dupré produced many similar scenes of watering cows. The combination of cattle and a country pool gave him the opportunity to exhibit his various talents: his virtuosity is particularly visible in the rendering of water, the vegetation and the hides of the animals.
Also notable is the intimate character of this fine watercolour. In contrast to other, comparable works, the composition is enclosed, with trees screening the horizon from view. The dominant green tints of the landscape and pool create the impression of early-morning.

According to Pierre Miquel, this watercolour was included in the wedding album presented to Marie-Louise Fernande de Bourbon on the occasion of her marriage to the Duc de Montpensier. This album contained works by a variety of artists. Dupré is supposed to have been introduced to the Duchesse de Monpensier in Vincennes on 22 February 1847 in the company of these artists, among them his friend Théodore Rousseau.
Jules Dupré
Cattle watering c. 1846
Provenance  Wedding album for the Duc de Montpensier and Marie-Louise Fernande de Bourbon, given by the Orléans family on 10 October 1846; Antoine, duc de Montpensier; Isabelle d'Orléans, daughter of the above; Amélie, queen of Portugal; Comte and Comtesse de Paris; private collection, Europe; Sotheby's (London), 11 June 1997, lot 39; Stoppenbach & Delestre Ltd, London; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum (1997).


**Dupuis, Georges**  
**French, 1875-?**

At the country tavern c. 1904  
Black chalk and watercolour, 31.8 × 48.0 cm  
Signed at bottom right with monogram: GD (entwined)  
d 1085 S/1997

Georges Dupuis was a much sought-after book illustrator at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th in France. This drawing, depicting a scene in a dance-hall, was the basis for an illustration, engraved by Lemoine, for Camille Lemonnier's *Un mâle* (1904). The drawing perfectly captures the atmosphere of fin-de-siècle France and is reminiscent of the work of such artists as Toulouse-Lautrec and Steinlen.


Hartrick, Archibald Standish  
**Scottish, 1864-1950**
Vincent van Gogh got to know Archibald Standish Hartrick during his stay in Paris in 1886-88. They met at the studio of Fernand Cormon, where both were students. Hartrick reminisced about this period in his memoirs, *A painter's pilgrimage through life* (Cambridge 1939), mentioning all his Paris acquaintances, and describing both Vincent's work and personality in detail. This drawing was the frontispiece for the book. Aside from the self-portraits, this sheet represents one of the few known likenesses of the artist.

**Provenance** Private collection; Agnew and Son, London; purchased by the Vincent van Gogh Foundation (1997).

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**Ibels, Henri-Gabriel**  
French, 1867-1936

‘*Le devoir*’ 1892  
Gouache on card, 24 × 32 cm; 28 × 34 cm  
Signed at bottom centre: *H.C. Ibels* verso: Street scene  
15 × 14.5 cm  
d 1077 S/1997

Although Ibels was also a painter and writer, he is best known for his work as an engraver. The lithograph was a much celebrated medium at the end of the 19th century, due in part to the flourishing art of the theatre poster, which so enlivened the city streets. Ibels's caricatural style was enormously popular. He also provided illustrations for a variety of books, including Emile Zola's *La terre*.

This gouache, one of eight designs made by Ibels for programmes at the Théâtre Libre, was intended for *Le devoir*, a play in four acts by Louis Bruyerre which was performed in the 1892-93 season.
The verso shows a sketch of a street scene. A man in a top hat is seen from the rear. A female figure passes a street lamp.

**Provenance** Christopher Drake, London; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum (1997).

**Lebourge, Charles-Albert**  
**French, 1849-1928**

- Woman reading by candlelight 1880  
  Black chalk, heightened with white, $47 \times 31.2$ cm  
  Signed and dated at lower left: *A Lebourg 1880*  
  d1067 S/1997

Charles-Albert Lebourg usually painted appealing landscapes and river views. He exhibited his work at the fourth and fifth impressionist exhibitions, in 1879 and 1880 respectively. While he was by no means unsuccessful during his lifetime, he is no longer as celebrated as many of his colleagues who showed at the same events.

As we see in this drawing, dated 1880, Lebourg was very adept at the depiction of refined candlelight effects. The woman is rendered in an exquisitely subtle chiaroscuro, while the actual light-source - the flame of the candle standing before her - is hidden by the letter she reads. This method of modelling with light from a source that is seen only partially, if at all, goes back to the 17th century, and was much used by painters like Gerard van Honthorst.

Lebourg has executed his work in black chalk, making only sparing use of the white heightening. Although difficult, drawing almost exclusively in black media was a very popular technique in the second half of the 19th century. Millet, Seurat and Redon were consummate masters of the art, and Lebourg was himself highly proficient. His manner of capitalising on the coarse relief of the laid paper is extremely adroit.

A somewhat more elaborate sheet, depicting the artist's wife and mother reading by candlelight, is in the British Museum. The young woman in the drawing in the Van Gogh Museum has not been identified.


**Lhermitte, Léon-Augustin**  
**French, 1844-1925**

- The shoemakers  
  Black chalk on laid paper, $46.5 \times 63.2$ cm  
  signed at lower left: *L Lhermitte*  
  d1084 S/1997

In addition to his large naturalistic paintings of the 1880-90 period, Lhermitte also made a considerable number of drawings in black chalk. These works are considerably

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less monumental than his paintings; in them, the artist sought primarily to capture the natural effects of light and to render authentic detail effectively. The greater number show night-time scenes and interiors.

The shoemakers is no exception: here, too, it is the details and the gradations of light that are the most striking. The light falling through the window is drawn in fine tones of grey, thus creating a rich chiaroscuro effect, which in turn evokes an intimate atmosphere. The interior with a single window as its source of light is reminiscent of those found in 17th-century Dutch painting.

From Lhermitte’s own inscription on the back of a photographic reproduction of the work, we learn that this drawing was executed in Mont-Saint-Père (near Fery) in April 1880 (Exécuté à Mont-Saint-Père en avril 1880. Vendu à Manchester la même année). This is confirmed by the costume of the woman, which is characteristic of this French village. The sheet is a preliminary study for a painting of the same title, which is now in a private collection. The painting, however, is less detailed.

**Provenance** Sold Manchester (1880); studio of the artist; private collection, Pyla; private collection, Paris (1982); Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, London; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum (1997).

Charles-Albert Lebourg
Woman reading by candlelight 1880
Jean-François Raffaëlli
Self-portrait
Raffaëlli, Jean-François
French, 1850-1824

Self-portrait
Pastel, crayon and chalk on board, original exhibition frame, 54 × 38 cm

Signed centre right: JF Raffaëlli 1879
d 1034 V/1992

This self-portrait of Jean-François Raffaëlli (1850-1824) was shown by the artist at the sixth group exhibition of the impressionists in 1881.

Raffaëlli demonstrated his attachment to this drawing by including it in an exhibition he mounted of his own work in 1884. It is made after a photograph that is still known today, and is executed in his own characteristic technique, which he even went to the trouble of patenting. He worked with a kind of greasy pastel that was somewhat more robust than the usual powdery types of pastel.

Van Gogh much respected Raffaëlli’s work and artistic ideas, which he knew from a pamphlet the artist published for his 1884 exhibition. The collection in the Van Gogh Museum now contains one painting by Raffaëlli, as well as two pastels and a number of other works on paper. The drawing still has its original, wide grey frame, which features a gold-coloured inlay.


Renouard, Charles Paul
French, 1845-1924

Portrait of the sculptor Carriès 1892
Black chalk on paper, 32,5 × 24,2 cm
Signed at upper right: le sculpteur François Carriès PR
d 1083 S/1997

Charles Paul Renouard, a pupil of Isidore Pils (1813-1875), was a painter and draughtsman. His drawings, often sharply-observed portraits or striking representations of common folk, are characterised by the same great accuracy and clarity of line that
made his images so suitable for magazine illustrations. Vincent van Gogh had a considerable admiration for his work, which he knew mainly from such periodicals.

Powerfully executed with a swift line, this portrait of the French sculptor Jean-Joseph Carriès (1855-1894) busily kneading one of his symbolist works is a good example of Renouard's talent for portraiture. A wood engraving by Florian after the drawing was published in *La Revue Illustrée* (1 August 1892); the drawing was thus probably also executed that same year. Three sculptures by Carriès feature in this sheet, all of which have been identified: the artist is shown modelling the ceramic *Tête de faune*; in front of it stands *Le grenouillard* (Paris, Musée d'Orsay); and the child's head in the foreground is the *Bébé pensif*.

**Provenance** Kunsthandel Van Duyvenbirk & Brouwer, Amsterdam; purchased by the Van Gogh Museum (1997).

Sculpture

Carriès, Jean-Joseph
French, 1855-1894

Charles I of England 1887
plaster relief, patinated beige, 33 × 61 × 56 cm signed on the front of the cushion: Carriès JH/ août 1887; at the back, on the banderole: Fondu par l'ami Bingen l'an 87; and thereunder: Je dédie cette oeuvre / au bon docteur / Duborgia / son ami Carriès / fait à la Ferme du / Camp Forest / de Louveciennes / près Paris en 87; and, on the base: Bingen fondeur

Born in Lyon in 1885 to a poor family of shoemakers, Jean-Joseph Carriès learnt moulding and die-cutting from the sculptor Pierre Vermare. Encouraged by his master and supported by the success of a number of busts, he enrolled at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1874.

In 1881 the 26-year-old Carriès presented his sculpture of Charles I at the Paris Salon, together with L'aveugle, Le déshérété and Tête désespérée. These four works, each one an expressive character piece, were received enthusiastically in the press: the art critic Judith Gauthier, for example, wrote in Le Rappel: ‘These busts [...] are so poignant that one would think at first sight that they were made directly from life [...] One might say that this was painted art, especially with respect to the head of the deceased Charles I, which is well nigh a Van Dyck! [...]’ This exhibition at the Salon heralded the start of a multitude of sculptural activities - including not only portraiture and mask-making in widely diverging techniques, but also ceramics, a medium in which Carriès experimented with special patinas, enamels and matt glazes.

Recalling the severed head of John the Baptist, the head of the English king Charles I (1600-1649) has been laid on a cushion, making this a symbolic image of death rather than a realistic portrait. This melancholy symbolism is reinforced by the face's mysterious expression, by the closed eyes, and by the fact that the head appears to loom up out of nothingness. Carriès's approach represented a complete break with the academic tradition of modeled busts set on a pedestal. Charles I - who was beheaded on Cromwell's orders in 1649 after a turbulent civil war - is here depicted as a tragic figure, much as he is
described in the dramatic poems of Shelley (1827) and A.G. Butler (1874).

The piece in the Van Gogh Museum is a fine patinated variant of the only known bronze example, which is in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. Carriès, a master of patination, imparts a painterly quality to this striking bust that is very different from the more severe contrast of light and dark seen in the bronze version. In the respect, it comes much closer to a delicate wax version now in a private collection.


Exhibitions in the Van Gogh Museum
January 1997-July 1998

1997

Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema
29 November 1996-2 March
exhib. cat. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema,
Zwolle 1996
(ISBN 90 400 9847 6)

Vienna 1900
Portrait and interior
21 March-15 June
(Organised in conjunction with the
Österreichische Galerie
Belvedere, Vienna. The exhibition travelled to the Von der Heydt-Museum,
Wuppertal.)
Exhib. cat. Wenen 1900: portret en
interieur, Zwolle 1997
(ISBN 90 400 9938 3)

Vincent van Gogh: the drawings of the
Van Gogh
Museum. Part II: Nuenen 1883-1885
20 June-12 October
Exhib. cat. Vincent van Gogh: drawings:
Nuenen 1883-1885, Naarden 1997
(ISBN 90 6611 5114)

Auguste Préalat 1809-1879
Romanticism in bronze
17 October-11 January 1998
(Organised in conjunction with the
Réunion des Musées
Nationaux/Musée d'Orsay and the Musée des Beaux-Arts du château de Blois)
Exhib. cat. Auguste Préalat 1809-1879:
Romantiek in brons/Romanticism in
bronze, Zwolle 1997
(ISBN 90 400 9967 7)

1998
Utagawa Kuniyoshi, 1798-1861: Heroes and ghosts
30 January-5 April
(Organised in conjunction with the Society for Japanese Arts. The exhibition travelled to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.)
(ISBN 90 74822 10 X)

Jewels from a photographic collection: photographs of the Leiden University Print Room, 1860-1900
17 April-31 August
(ISBN 90 804274 1 1)

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