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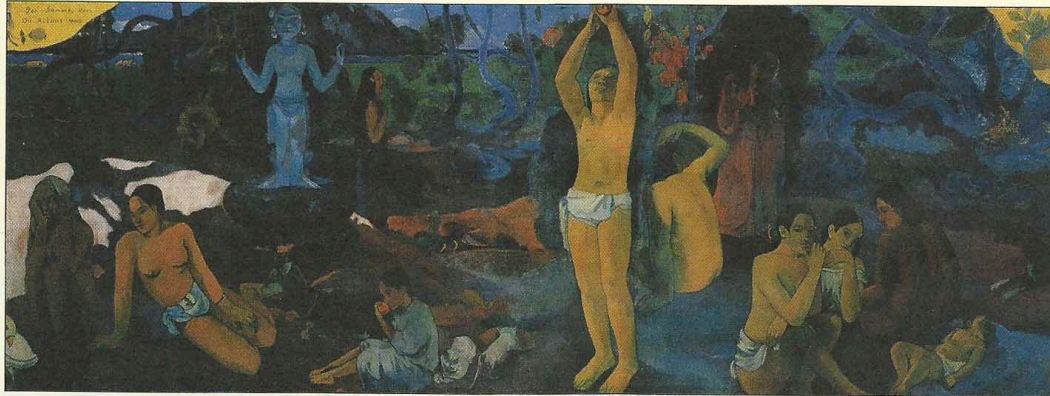
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EXHIBITIONS Continental Europe

Gauguin's 'will and testament'

The French painter is the subject of a retrospective that includes important rediscovered sculpture



Leading loans: Gauguin's *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897-98, and the recently rediscovered sculpture *Thérèse*, 1902

POST-IMPRESSIONISM

Riehen/Basel. The Fondation Beyeler's Paul Gauguin retrospective will be the most ambitious exhibition mounted at the museum since its establishment in 1997. After six years of work, the museum has secured the loan of 50 paintings and sculptures from 13 countries. It is being billed as the greatest exhibition of Gauguin's work since "Gauguin: Tahiti" was held at the Grand Palais in Paris and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (MFA) in 2003-04.

Raphaël Bouvier, the Beyeler show's co-curator, wants to present Gauguin as "one of the forerunners of Modern art". The exhibition will also fill a gap, since Gauguin is the most important Post-Impressionist artist still missing from the Beyeler's permanent collection. Although the Basel show is covering the artist's full career, it will concentrate on his period in Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands, from 1891 until his death in 1903. It was there that he did his greatest work. In Polynesia he sought an exotic world, combining nature and culture,

mysticism and eroticism, and dream and reality.

The most important loan will be the monumental (nearly four metres wide) *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897-98, which is being lent by the MFA and which very rarely travels. Martin Schwander, the show's co-curator, describes the work as Gauguin's "artistic last will and testament". In return, the Beyeler is offering a group of important Picasso loans to the MFA, although this has not yet been announced.

Russia's two major museums, the Hermitage Museum and the Pushkin Museum, are each lending three important paintings. These include the Pushkin's *Rupe Rupe*, 1899, which has only rarely been lent since its arrival in Moscow more than a century ago. To help secure the Russian loans, the Beyeler is sponsoring the current Pushkin exhibition "Paul Klee: Not a Day Without a Line" (until 1 March), which includes loans from the Basel museum and the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern. Important private loans include three paintings from 1902, the year

before Gauguin's death: *Riders on the Beach II*, (owner unidentified, but once in the Niarchos collection), *The Incantation* (courtesy of *Ordovas gallery*, London) and *Bathers* from an unnamed collection.

Gauguin's sculptures are often overlooked. However, his ceramics and carved wood sculptures are highly inventive, revealing a different side to his work. They had a powerful influence on such 20th-century artists as Pablo Picasso. Bouvier says: "It was Gauguin's sculptures, their expressive power and their archaic air, that left their mark on Picasso's first essays in the medium." Among the exciting rediscoveries in the Beyeler show will be Gauguin's *Thérèse*, 1902, a carved figure of a stylised Polynesian woman.

Sam Keller, the Beyeler's director, had always wanted to include *Thérèse*, but it had disappeared around 1980, and was since hidden away in a private London collection. Keller spotted it at Frieze

Masters last October, on the stand of the London gallery Lefevre Fine Art, which is lending the sculpture for the show. The haunting figure of the woman is said to depict a servant of the Marquesan Catholic bishop, Joseph Martin, who Gauguin believed had sexual relations with his employees. Sadly, the pendant sculpture of the bishop, *Père Paillard* (Father Lechery), 1902, now at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, is not being borrowed, so the bishop and the servant will not be reunited.

The Fondation Beyeler is the only venue for the show, since securing the major loans for a second institution would have proved too difficult. The museum is expecting around 300,000 visitors, which is likely to make it Switzerland's most popular exhibition of the year.

"Paul Gauguin" is supported by the Swiss pharmaceutical company Novartis.

Martin Bailey

• Paul Gauguin, Fondation Beyeler, Basel, 8 February-28 June

