

Paul Gauguin

Earthly Paradise

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Cat. 9

With Émile Bernard (French, 1868–1941)
*Earthly Paradise*¹

1888

Chestnut and pine, carved and polychromed; glass, metal hardware;
101 × 120 × 60.5 cm (39 3/4 × 47 1/4 × 23 13/16 in.)

Signed and dated: *Paul Gauguin and Emile Bernard* (carved with a curved gouge, center lower edge of the bottom panel on the front of the cabinet), 1888 (carved with a curved gouge, lower left corner of the same panel)

The Art Institute of Chicago, through prior gift of Henry Morgen, Ann G. Morgen, Meyer Wasser, and Ruth G. Wasser; restricted gift of Edward M. Blair, 2007.247

Commentary

Genesis

By the summer of 1886, when Gauguin first worked in Pont-Aven, the small village on the coast of Brittany had been “colonized” for several decades by a multinational group of artists who were attracted to the region’s traditions and indigenous population, especially the women (*bretonnes*), with their ornate velvet and lace folkloric ensembles and picturesque bonnets, or coifs.² When Gauguin returned to Pont-Aven in 1888, he was surrounded by an ever-growing group of followers.³ Becoming known collectively as the Pont-Aven School, its members called for a new approach to easel painting based on the memory of a subject and the feelings it elicits and for a manner freed from perspective, modeling, and narrative detail. Émile Bernard, a precocious artist who stayed in Pont-Aven in the summer of 1888, became Gauguin’s friend and closest rival. In paintings such as *Breton Women in the Meadow* (fig. 9.1), Bernard followed Gauguin’s lead, challenging the conventions of easel painting with a style featuring heavily contoured figures and forms and flat zones of color.

In a unique collaboration, the forty-year-old Gauguin and twenty-year-old Bernard worked together to make this carved and painted work of art, *Earthly Paradise*,⁴ a piece of wooden furniture that might be either a bookcase or a cabinet. They completed it during the short time (mid-



fig. 9.1 Émile Bernard (French, 1868–1941). *Breton Women in the Meadow*, 1888. Oil on canvas; 93 × 74 cm (36 5/8 × 29 1/8 in.). Private collection.

August to mid-October) that they were together in Pont-Aven. Signed with both names and dated 1888, the cabinet attests to their shared interests in the regional arts and crafts of Brittany at a time when they were most involved in exploring Synthetist-Symbolist themes and stylistic innovations. It remained in a private collection for decades and only recently appeared in the Bernard and Gauguin literature.⁵ Neither artist mentioned carving and painting decorative friezes for pieces of furniture. This, and the fact that the cabinet was never exhibited during the lifetime of either artist, makes it all the more difficult to determine how this object came to be, for whom it was made, and why.

Bernard told the collector and art critic Marcel Guérin that the cabinet was intended for a mutual friend, the lawyer-turned-artist Henri-Ernest-Ponthier de Chamaillard, who asked a *menuisier du pays* (country carpenter) to make the cabinet body, which Bernard and Gauguin decorated with bas-reliefs.⁶ In contrast to this account, the art critic André Salmon implied that Chamaillard was the cocreator, along with Gauguin.⁷ Salmon, who visited Chamaillard in 1911 at his family's home, Mesquéon-en-Gourlizon, recalled seeing three pieces of furniture that Chamaillard had executed: a small, low, crudely carved cabinet; a larger one that was shown at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Paris, in 1910; and another (presumably *Earthly Paradise*), which bore carved signatures, including one made by Gauguin.⁸ Salmon's synopsis implies Chamaillard's authorship of the other carved signature but leaves the question open.⁹ However, Chamaillard, who had just left his law office in nearby Quimperlé and moved to Pont-Aven, in June 1888, was only beginning to paint landscapes, in a modified Impressionist style.¹⁰ Further, none of the wood bas-reliefs, sculptures, or furniture attributed to him are datable to before 1900.¹¹ While Chamaillard was certainly part of the group of Pont-Aven artists, Gauguin considered Bernard to be the promising pupil and it was likely with him that Gauguin would have gladly collaborated.¹²

Bernard's version of the making of the cabinet—that Chamaillard commissioned a piece of furniture that Bernard and Gauguin decorated—is supported by the piece's physical characteristics (see below) and the biographies of the artists. In the summer of 1888, Chamaillard had money and was busy courting his future wife, Louise Lamour, niece of the postmistress, whose house above the post office was a meeting place for artists staying at the Pension Gloanec.¹³ Facing family pressure, the couple eloped the following year and was forced to leave Pont-Aven for the latter part of 1889, causing Gauguin to complain to Bernard, "Things have changed here at Pont-Aven. We see nothing at all of Chamaillard. He is completely tied up by women [his wife and her aunt], who have warned him to be on his guard against me."¹⁴ It is likely that the cabinet, which would have been both a conversation piece and physical proof of having rubbed shoulders with the master, remained in the possession of Chamaillard, who stayed in the region but was never able to succeed as either an artist or lawyer.¹⁵ In 1916, to pay off his creditors, he was forced to auction off the contents of his family home, Mesquéon-en-Gourlizon, near Quimper.¹⁶ At that point, the cabinet may have been sent directly to Paris, as referenced by a Quimper transport label glued directly onto the left side of the piece (fig. 9.2).¹⁷



fig. 9.2 Detail of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing a Quimper transport label. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.

Iconography

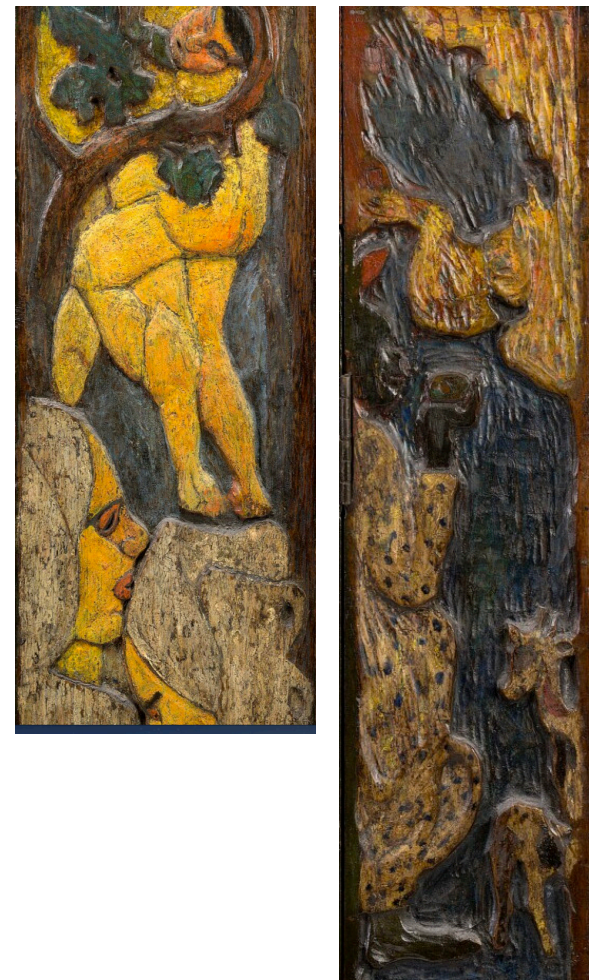
The improbability of Chamaillard's participation in the physical making or decorating of the cabinet does not preclude his participation in its creation. The three men likely agreed upon the sections that would be carved, the number of panels (five, two of which are horizontal and three of which are vertical), and the appropriate palette. For the themes, Gauguin and Bernard repeated motifs (Breton men and women, flowering trees, goats, geese) that had appeared in the most significant canvases each artist produced during the summer of 1888: Bernard's *Breton Women in the Meadow* (fig. 9.1) and Gauguin's *Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)* (fig. 9.3 [W 245, W 2002 308]). Now considered breakthrough paintings for the two artists, these works embody the Symbolist and Synthetist principles they embraced: working with intangible, spiritual subjects and employing color and line informed by the art of non-European cultures, such as Japanese wood-block prints.¹⁸

It seems clear from the motifs and style of the decorative registers that Gauguin executed at least part of the cabinet's upper horizontal panel, as well as the right and center vertical panels—all of which are more notably three-dimensional than other areas of relief. The center panel, for example, features a wrestling pair (fig. 9.4), below which are two heads in profile, one looking straight ahead and the other bowed, as if in prayer. Curiously, the head of one wrestler—its half-closed eyes giving the face a demonic quality—appears to float next to the athletes' bodies rather than being anchored atop one of them. All of the figures in this panel relate to figures seen in Gauguin's *Vision of the Sermon*. For example, the panel and painting both feature attendant women wearing Breton headdresses, as well as a diagonal tree. Further, the wrestlers seen near the top of the panel echo Jacob struggling with the angel in the painting. For both Gauguin and Bernard, a *lutte* (a fight or struggle) was a personal metaphor for the challenges they faced in their call for a new artistic vocabulary.¹⁹ These wrestlers, then, could be seen as a continuation of Gauguin's interest in this metaphor. According to Fred Leeman, the wrestlers may have a sexual implication.²⁰ Leeman posited that the woman at the lower left of the panel may represent Bernard's sister Madeleine, to whom the older artist was unduly attracted, while the wrestling nudes refer to sexuality and sin, and the disembodied demon head possibly represents Gauguin himself.²¹

In the vertical panel on the right, Gauguin signaled his other identity—a painter of the tropics—with figures and forms drawn from his trip the previous year to the Caribbean island of Martinique. In the upper portion (fig. 9.5) a shaman-like figure sports a dotted dress similar to the one worn by a woman depicted in a plate from the *Volpini Suite*, entitled *Les cigales et les fourmis* (*The Grasshoppers and the Ants*) (cat. 17 [Kornfeld 5 A,b]), who is seen carrying a basket in one hand while balancing another on her head. The title of this plate refers to a well-known Jean de La Fontaine fable, and here Gauguin depicts the “ants” as the industrious hard-working women, who are in contrast to the idle women, or “grasshoppers,” seen lounging on the beach.²² The figure seen in this vertical panel is turned to the right and holds what seems to be an instrument, or perhaps a pipe. Above her there are winding amorphous shapes that could be smoke emanating from a pipe, or perhaps leafy branches extending from tree trunks that flank this panel. To the right and slightly below this figure is a curious shape that turns out to represent two goats, the mother depicted in profile and the nursing baby foreshortened and seen from behind.²³ Similar types and subjects are also



fig. 9.3 Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903). *Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*, 1888. Oil on canvas; 72.2 × 91 cm (28 7/16 × 35 13/16 in.). National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, Purchased 1925.



Left: fig. 9.4 Detail of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing the center vertical panel. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.

Right: fig. 9.5 Detail of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing the upper portion of the vertical panel on the right side. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.

seen in the sketchbook—known as the Album Briant (Musée d'Orsay, Paris, held at the Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Arts Graphiques)—he used during his trip to Martinique.²⁴ In 1888–89 he recycled these motifs in several paintings, watercolors, fans, and wood-block prints. For example, the subject of a goat nursing a baby goat reappears in the 1889 zincograph *Pastorales Martinique* (*Martinique Pastorals*) (fig. 9.6 [cat. 18] [Kornfeld 6 A]), from the *Volpini Suite*.²⁵ More closely related to Martinique themes are the two figures that comprise the bottom portion of the panel (fig. 9.7). One, a Martinique woman wearing a broad-brimmed, straw-colored hat and striped shirt, is similar to a seated figure in the 1887 painting *Fruit Porters at Turin Bight* (fig. 9.8 [W 218, W 2002 253]).²⁶ At the bottom right, cropped by the edge of the vertical panel, is the head and shoulders of a female figure, also presumably a Martinique motif, whose pronounced cheekbones, strong chin, squinting and downcast eyes, and red-green-and-black-checked kerchief are very similar to those of figures in earlier works by Gauguin, such as the 1887 painting *The Mango Trees, Martinique* (fig. 9.9 [W 224, W 2002 250]), and the 1887/88 earthenware *Portrait Head of a Martinique Woman with a Kerchief* (fig. 9.10 [Gray 52]).



fig. 9.6 Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903). *Martinique Pastorals*, from the *Volpini Suite*, 1889. Zincograph in black ink on chrome yellow wove paper; 186 × 224 mm (image); 223 × 291 mm (plate, approx.); 501 × 650 mm (sheet). The Art Institute of Chicago, William McCallin McKee Memorial Endowment, 1943.1025.



fig. 9.7 Detail of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing the bottom portion of the vertical panel on the right side. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.



fig. 9.8 Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903). *Fruit Porters at Turin Bight*, 1887. Oil on canvas; 46 × 61 cm (18 1/8 × 24 in.). Private collection.



fig. 9.9 Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903). *The Mango Trees, Martinique*, 1887. Oil on canvas; 89 × 116 cm (35 1/16 × 45 11/16 in.). Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).



fig. 9.10 Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903). *Portrait Head of a Martinique Woman Wearing a Kerchief*, 1887–88. Unglazed stoneware, decorated with slip; height, 21.1 cm (8 5/16 in.). Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, inv. no. 3553.

Only one of the cabinet's five panels can be securely ascribed to Bernard, based on style and subject. The composition of the vertical panel at the left (fig. 9.11) shows in descending order geese in the clearing of an apple tree, a man's head also surrounded by fruit-tree foliage, two Breton women carrying apples, a group of three geese, more greenery (this time without apples), and the stacked heads of three Breton women. As in other works Bernard executed that summer—see, for example, *Breton Women in the Meadow* (fig. 9.1) and the watercolor *Lane in Brittany with Figures* (fig. 9.12)—he flattened the space so that small figures in the background seem to hang above the larger figures in the foreground.²⁷ The panel also exhibits a carving technique very different from that of Gauguin. The lower relief and more finicky details (in contrast to the simpler outlined figures of Bernard's paintings and works on paper) may reveal the younger artist's tentativeness in this medium when faced with Gauguin's assured and fluid use of the gouge to interlace figures within a composition's overall rhythm.²⁸ In the middle panel especially, Gauguin's carving skill enabled him to create a sense of foreground and background that is almost as painterly as it is sculptural. The less-experienced Bernard, on the other hand, gouged too deeply into the apple tree at the upper left of the composition, leaving a deep hole that cuts through the panel and into the support (see Technical Study).

The authorship of the two horizontal panels is more difficult to pinpoint. Gauguin's hand is recognizable in the far left side of the upper horizontal panel (fig. 9.13), in which Breton women converse under a canopy of trees, a cow stands, and two geese preen.²⁹ These motifs can be found in drawings, watercolors, and ceramic pieces that Gauguin produced in 1887–88 (see, for example, *Vase in the Form of Leda and the Swan* [private collection] [Gray 63]). To the right of the curving tree trunk that separates the geese



fig. 9.11 Detail of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing the vertical panel on the left side. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.



fig. 9.12 Émile Bernard (French, 1868–1941). *Lane in Brittany with Figures*, 1888. Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper; 30.7 × 20.2 cm (12 1/6 × 7 15/16 in.). Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).



fig. 9.13 Detail of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing the left side of the top horizontal panel. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.

from the cow, Gauguin carved the legs and sabots of a man who is presumably sitting in the tree, the rest of his body cut off by the panel's edge. This intriguing detail is found as well in the top register of a watercolor design by the artist for a bookcase (fig. 9.14; discussed below). The rhythmic pacing from the dangling legs to the cow does not continue in the section at the right, with two Breton women (fig. 9.15). Stylistically, their outlines are more jagged, their profiles flatter and sharper than those of the forms to the left. The eye of the woman on the left is gouged in—creating a deep pinhole that has little to do with the more legible eye sockets of other women in the frieze (see fig. 9.16). If, as Belinda Thomson asserted, Gauguin left for Arles before completing the cabinet, Bernard may well have taken up the frieze where the elder artist had left off.³⁰ The presence of a less-skilled hand at work can also explain the traces of underdrawing on this panel, indicating that some attempt was made to map out the composition (see Technical Study). The question is whether this drawing is that of Gauguin or Bernard. Gauguin likely sketched out the general composition on the work surface, as he did when painting. If so, the variations between the drawing and carving, occurring primarily in the left-hand portion, may suggest that Gauguin, possessing technical mastery and an assured, free style, did not feel obliged to follow the guidelines he initially established.

It is difficult to assign an artist's hand to the bottom horizontal panel (fig. 9.17), where the artists incised their names and the date "1888." In comparison to the clearly defined themes drawn from Gauguin's Martinique and Pont-Aven repertory that feature on the other panels, the meaning of the scene depicted here—two shallowly carved, naked figures with snakes—remains unclear. Traditionally identified as Adam and Eve, they exhibit practically no anatomical differences, and the way that the snakes curl around each body further obscures each figure's sex. A case can be made for Bernard as the carver of this panel, for, by the following summer, he was increasingly including nudes and bathers in his compositions.³¹ However, the panel's low-relief carving—how the background was carved away to leave the human figures and foliage in silhouette—is stylistically similar to that of figures on a wine cask that Gauguin decorated the following summer (fig. 1.18 [Gray 84]).



fig. 9.14 Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903). *Project for the Decoration of a Bookcase*, 1888/90. Watercolor on paper; 47 × 64 cm (18 1/2 × 25 3/16 in.). Private collection, Papeete, Tahiti.



fig. 9.15 Detail of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing the right side of the upper horizontal panel. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.



fig. 9.16 Details of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) comparing the left and right sides of the upper horizontal panel. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.



fig. 9.18 Paul Gauguin (French, 1848–1903). *Carved Wooden Cask*, 1889–90. Wood barrel, carved and painted; 37 × 31 cm (14 9/16 × 12 3/16 in.). Joshua I. Latner Collection.



fig. 9.17 Detail of Gauguin and Bernard's *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing the lower horizontal panel. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.

Anatomy of the Cabinet

The shape, construction, and function of the Gauguin-Bernard cabinet do not resemble those of the heavily carved and polychrome furniture typical of native Breton craftsmen. The most notable difference is the use of glass to front the doors; conventional chests and sideboards from the region feature carved wood door panels. In addition to the glass, other nontraditional elements—including the flush-mounted doors and fixed interior shelf—corroborate Bernard’s claim that the piece was made expressly for Chamaillard and thus is an artist-designed work (see Technical Study).³²

Chestnut was used for the decorated face frame, cabinet top, and doors. The cabinet’s sides, back, and bottom—the least important areas in terms of decoration—are made of pine, which reflects the cabinetmaker’s understanding of his materials and trade.³³ That the face frame, made up of the five carved panels, is fairly well constructed also indicates that the piece was the work of someone who knew to execute the frame complete with predrilled peg holes for support (see Technical Study). However, some construction anomalies, including the nailing of the top of the cabinet to the sides (a nontraditional method) and the badly chipped shelf (which seems to have been cut after the assembly of the cabinet was complete), point to a reasonably skilled carpenter rather than a master cabinetmaker, supporting the suggestion that the piece might have been the work of the village frame maker.³⁴

Unlike the wooden clogs, canes, and wine cask (fig. 9.18) that Gauguin embellished with his carved motifs, *Earthly Paradise* was not a ready-made object, but rather a unique hybrid of functional cabinetry, bas-relief, and painting.³⁵ The face frame—the most important element of the ensemble—would have been completed first, since everything else had to be made to fit. Once the panels were cut and holes were drilled for the pegs, the face frame would have been dry fitted with the other components (without pegs) to test out the mortise-and-tenon joints and assure that they fit properly. In this way, the construction conforms to traditional Breton furniture making: the cabinet body would not have been assembled until the face frame, with the finished carved and painted panels, was ready for permanent attachment.³⁶

What is not typical is the thinly applied red paint layer located underneath the deep-green paint at the top, front, back, sides, and legs, as well as on the front edge of the interior shelf, suggesting that the entire exterior of the cabinet was originally painted a deep oxblood red (fig. 9.19 and Technical Study).³⁷ This color was traditionally used to coat furniture produced in Guerande, farther down the coast from Pont-Aven (fig. 9.20), but it was not commonly used in Pont-Aven itself.³⁸ Chamaillard is known to have used almost exclusively red and green for his polychrome wood sculptures. Was the original cabinet so distinctly (and decoratively) painted? Was the oxblood layer painted over at a later date (by Chamaillard or a subsequent owner), as styles and tastes changed? Certainly, the dark-green shade would have been an easier match for a traditional interior.

The dimensions of the Art Institute cabinet are similar to those indicated in the 1888/90 watercolor study *Project for the Decoration of a Bookcase* (fig. 9.14), a design that includes decorations around a set of double doors. This suggests that Gauguin was interested in creating yet another decorated cabinet (apparently never realized) based on the one that he and Bernard had conceived for Chamaillard.³⁹

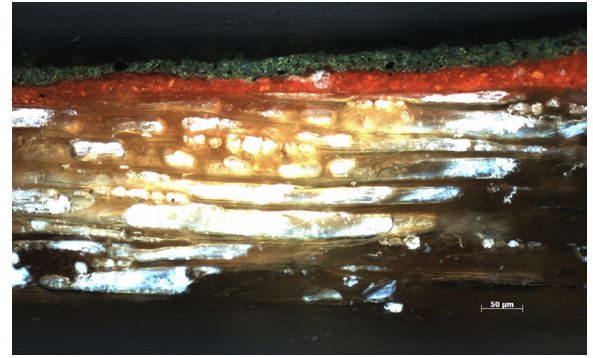


fig. 9.19 Photomicrograph of a cross-section from the lower bottom right of Gauguin and Bernard’s *Earthly Paradise* (1888) showing the original red paint layer that was applied to the body of the cabinet and the green layer that was later applied over the red. Original magnification: 200×, DIC illumination. The Art Institute of Chicago, 2007.247.



fig. 9.20 French, Armoire, 19th century. Carved oak with ox-blood patina, 220 × 165 × 89 cm (86 5/8 × 64 15/16 × 35 in.). Sold Adjug’art, Brest, L’ame Brettone, July 6, 2014, lot. 515.

Legacy

Ironically, while Gauguin had greater woodworking skills than Bernard, it was his young friend and follower who received commissions for future furniture projects. In comparison to the rather crudely carved figures on the left panel of *Earthly Paradise*, later examples of Bernard's carving—such as the 1891–92 *Corner Cabinet with Breton Scenes* (fig. 9.21), commissioned by Comte Antoine de La Rochefoucauld, and the large cupboard of 1891–93 now at the Norton Simon Art Foundation (fig. 9.22)—are notable as examples of Bernard's improved carving technique and more adept use of his tools.⁴⁰ While Gauguin did not carve another cabinet, decorated furniture pieces can be found in later painted interiors—most notably the 1897 *Tahitian interior Te rerioa (The Dream)* (Courtauld Gallery, London [W 557]), which features an ornately carved crib—showing his continued interest in decorated functional objects.⁴¹

Both artists drew upon the experience of their late summer–fall projects of 1888 to further their experimentations with printmaking. Bernard began a series of wood-block prints at the end of the year, including *The Laundry*, which has been compared to the “friezes [on pieces] of furniture that Bernard carved in 1888,” which was no doubt the Art Institute's cabinet.⁴² As for Gauguin, the *Volpini Suite* of zincographs on large yellow sheets that he executed in early 1889 (see cats. 11–23), showing scenes of Breton life as well as that of markets and beaches in Martinique, is a testament to the mixing of themes and figural types that was at the heart of his cabinet project.⁴³

More so than for Bernard's artistic evolution (which, after 1891, diverged from that of Gauguin), *Earthly Paradise* provides a link to Gauguin's abiding interest in decorating things from the dining room of Marie Henry in Le Pouldu to the imaginary rooms in the Tahitian canvases. It also points to Gauguin's understanding of art making as inclusive and interconnected in terms of media and imagery. Douglas Druick aptly described him as “Gauguin the painter, Gauguin the sculptor, the ceramicist, and the maker of prints, drawings, and printed drawings in which meaning is intimately bound up with the process of making.”⁴⁴

Earthly Paradise appears to have passed from Chamailard to Lluís Garriga Roig (1880–1939), a young Catalan living in Paris, in whose family it remained until 1993.⁴⁵ Although the cabinet seems to have fallen into obscurity, it was sufficiently known in 1935 that Ary Leblond, a collector and director of the Musée de la France d'Outremer (now the Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac), requested it for the museum's Galerie d'Honneur. Leblond had already secured a wood sculpture from Gauguin's Tahitian experience (lent by the painter Ker-Xavier Roussel) and no doubt wanted the cabinet, with its panels of Martinique images, to speak for Gauguin's other colonial interest.⁴⁶ For whatever reason, Garriga did not agree to lend Leblond the cabinet. Had it been placed on public view in 1935, when artists and individuals who had known Gauguin and Bernard at Pont-Aven might have seen it, the story behind this cabinet, along with a new perspective on a collaboration between the two artists, might have come to light long before the cabinet's reappearance on the market almost sixty years later.

Gloria Groom



fig. 9.21 Émile Bernard (French, 1868–1941). *Corner Cabinet with Breton Scenes*, 1891–92. Carved and polychromed wood; 278.1 × 107.35 × 13.34 cm (109 7/8 × 42 1/4 × 5 1/4 in.). Indianapolis Museum of Art, Samuel Josefowitz Collection of the School of Pont-Aven, through the generosity of the Jane H. Fortune European Art Fund, the Josefowitz Family, Anonymous Art Fund in memory of Louisa A. Vonnegut Peirce, The Ballard Fund, Rick and Alice Johnson, The Beeler Fund, 2010.38A–C.



fig. 9.22 Émile Bernard (French, 1868–1941). *Cupboard*, 1891–93. Wood, carved and painted; 241.3 × 149.9 × 50.8 cm (95 × 59 × 20 in.). Norton Simon Art Foundation, from the estate of Jennifer Jones Simon, M.2010.1.166.S.

Notes

- 1
The Art Institute currently uses the title that was given to the sculpture when it was exhibited for the first time in 2003. See André Cariou, *L'aventure de Pont-Aven et Gauguin*, exh. cat. (Skira, 2003), pp. 134; 135 (detail); 136; 137, cat. 36 (ill.). See also Fred Leeman, *Émile Bernard* (1868–1941), with Béatrice Recchi-Altarriba and Annie Champié (Wildenstein Institute/Citadelles & Mazenod, 2013), pp. 140; 141, cat. 70 (ill.); 142.
- 2
For a general history of the village and its artists, see Władysława Jaworska, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*, trans. Patrick Evans (New York Graphic Society, 1972); Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, with the collaboration of Charles-Guy Le Paul (Abbeville, 1987); and Caroline Boyle-Turner, *Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven: Prints and Paintings*, in collaboration with Samuel Josefowitz, foreword by Douglas Druick, exh. cat. (Royal Academy of Arts/Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989).
- 3
See Gauguin to Émile Schuffenecker, Aug. 14, 1888, in which Gauguin mentions the arrival of a new student, Émile Bernard, and that “the group is expanding.” Gauguin also mentions that, “all the Americans here have been raving against Impressionism,” suggesting that not all of the artists in Pont-Aven were behind Gauguin and his avant-garde style. For the letter, see *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, ed. Maurice Malingue (B. Grasset, 1946), p. 134, no. 67, translated excerpt from Belinda Thomson, ed., *Gauguin by Himself* (Bulfinch, 1993), p. 89.
- 4
Since the cabinet was not exhibited with a title during the lifetime of either artist, the current title is descriptive. Largely a reference to Gauguin’s lifelong pursuit of paradise on Earth, as represented here by the depictions of scenes from both Pont-Aven and Martinique. Given the depiction of Adam and Eve in the lower horizontal register, this title could also be seen as a reference to Gauguin and Bernard’s shared concerns over religious traditions in general, and issues regarding our “origins” in specific. These concerns would continue to preoccupy Gauguin for the rest of his career and arguably culminated in the monumental *D’où venons nous, Qui sommes nous, Où allons nous* (*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*) (1898; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston [W 561]).
- 5
See, for example, Denise Delouche, *Gauguin et la Bretagne* (Apogée, 1996), p. 54 (ill.); and André Cariou, *L'aventure de Pont-Aven et Gauguin*, exh. cat. (Skira, 2003), pp. 134; 135 (detail); 136; 137, cat. 36 (ill.). See also Provenance.
- 6
For the description Bernard gave to Guérin, see Marcel Guérin, *L'oeuvre gravé de Gauguin* (H. Floury, 1927; Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 1980), pp. 12–13.
- 7
See André Salmon, “Chamaillard et le groupe de Pont-Aven,” *L'art vivant* 1, no. 13 (July 1, 1925), p. 15.
- 8
See André Salmon, “Chamaillard et le groupe de Pont-Aven,” *L'art vivant* 1, no. 13 (July 1, 1925), p. 15: “Mais le meuble de Mesquéon, à deux volets, portait deux signatures. Paul Gauguin avait taillé le bois du premier volet.”
- 9
Salmon touted Chamaillard as having inspired Gauguin’s chromatic choices when painting on wood, no doubt to strengthen his artist friend’s ties to Gauguin’s genius and perhaps increase interest in Chamaillard’s art. See André Salmon, “Les arts et la vie: La peinture II,” *Revue de France* 12, no. 2 (Jan. 15, 1932), p. 288, excerpt translated in Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, with the collaboration of Charles-Guy Le Paul (Abbeville, 1987), p. 270.
- 10
Quimperlé is only a few miles from Pont-Aven; see Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, with the collaboration of Charles-Guy Le Paul (Abbeville, 1987), p. 260.

- 11
For more on Chamaillard, see Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, with the collaboration of Charles-Guy Le Paul (Abbeville, 1987), pp. 259–70. See also Władysława Jaworska, *Gauguin and the Pont-Aven School*, trans. Patrick Evans (New York Graphic Society, 1972), pp. 187–90. Chamaillard’s first known exhibition was held at the gallery of Ambroise Vollard, Paris, in December 1900. In addition to paintings, the exhibition included “un meuble sculpté” (a carved piece of furniture) and “dix panneaux sculptés” (ten carved panels). See Galerie Vollard, *Exposition Chamaillard*, preface by Arsène Alexandre, exh. cat. (Floury et Marty, 1900).
- 12
Gauguin to Émile Schuffenecker, Aug. 14, 1888: “J’ai commencé un élève qui marchera: la bande augmente. Le petit Bernard est ici et a rapporté de St Briac des choses intéressantes. En voilà un qui ne redoute rien.” (I have taken on a pupil who will go far: the group is expanding. Young Bernard is here and has brought some interesting things with him from St. Briac. He is one person who is not afraid to try anything.). For the letter, see *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, ed. Maurice Malingue (B. Grasset, 1946), p. 134, no. 67, translated excerpt from Belinda Thomson, ed., *Gauguin by Himself* (Bulfinch, 1993), p. 89.
- 13
See Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, with the collaboration of Charles-Guy Le Paul (Abbeville, 1987), pp. 260–62. It is possible that Chamaillard’s future wife, Louise Lamour, is the subject of Gauguin’s painting *Young Woman in front of a Window* (*The Fiancée*, 1888; Triton Foundation, Netherlands [W 242, W 2002 292]).
- 14
See Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, with the collaboration of Charles-Guy Le Paul (Abbeville, 1987), pp. 262–64.
- 15
See Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, with the collaboration of Charles-Guy Le Paul (Abbeville, 1987), pp. 265–66. In 1893 Chamaillard was forced to return to the practice of law in order to supplement his income as an artist.
- 16
See Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven*, with the collaboration of Charles-Guy Le Paul (Abbeville, 1987), p. 270. Chamaillard died penniless at Eaubonne (Val-d’Oise) in 1931.
- 17
According to Marie-Noëlle Polino, Association pour l’Histoire des Chemins de Fer en France, it is a railway mailing label that was put on items going via train to Paris, but the date and circumstances of the label cannot be identified. See Juliet Bareaux to Gloria Groom, Feb. 15, 2009, email correspondence, curatorial object file, Department of European Painting and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago.
- 18
Gauguin began *Vision after the Sermon* soon after Bernard’s arrival in Pont-Aven in early August. See Belinda Thomson’s convincing arguments for a plausible time frame in Thomson, ed., *Gauguin’s Vision*, with Frances Fowle and Lesley Stevenson, exh. cat. (National Galleries of Scotland, 2005), pp. 52–53.
- 19
See Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South*, in collaboration with Britt Salvesen, with contributions by Kristin Hoermann Lister and the assistance of Mary C. Weaver, exh. cat. (Art Institute of Chicago/Van Gogh Museum/Thames & Hudson, 2001), p. 120. According to Druick and Zegers, “the French term *lutte*—translatable as struggle, fight, combat, or contest—had long been used to figure the demands of creativity” but that this term “gained particular currency among the Neo-Impressionist vanguard.”
- 20
See Fred Leeman, *Émile Bernard* (1868–1941), with Béatrice Recchi-Altarriba and Annie Champié (Wildenstein Institute/Citadelles & Mazenod, 2013), p. 140.

21

See Fred Leeman, *Émile Bernard (1868–1941)*, with Béatrice Recchi-Altarrriba and Annie Champié (Wildenstein Institute/Citadelles & Mazenod, 2013), pp. 140–41. Leeman quotes a letter (p. 142) from Madeleine to her brother in which she sarcastically, according to Leeman, thanks her brother for a photograph of Gauguin that he sent to her. Madeleine is known to have liked dressing in traditional Breton garb; see Émile Bernard, *Souvenirs inédits sur l'artiste peintre Paul Gauguin et ses compagnons lors de leur séjour à Pont-Aven et au Pouldu* (Nouveliste du Morbihan, [1941]), pp. 11, 15, 17. Belinda Thomson saw Madeleine's features—upturned nose, high cheekbones, alert expression—in the Breton woman who alone looks upon the spiritual wrestling match depicted in *Vision of the Sermon*. See Belinda Thomson, ed., *Gauguin's Vision*, with Frances Fowle and Lesley Stevenson, exh. cat. (National Galleries of Scotland, 2005), pp. 50–51, 56.

22

According to Agnieszka Juszcak, the grasshoppers are described as bohemians in the *La Fontaine* fable, and the temperament of these characters appealed to Gauguin, see Chris Juszcak, “The Iconography of the *Volpini Suite*,” in Heather Lemonedes, Belinda Thomson, and Agnieszka Juszcak, *Paul Gauguin: Paris 1889*, with contributions by Chris Stolwijk and Moyna Stanton, exh. cat. (Cleveland Museum of Art/Van Gogh Museum/Hatje Cantz, 2009), pp. 146–48. I am grateful to Karen Pope, senior lecturer in art history at Baylor University, for her insights into the Martinique references in this panel. For a thorough description of the genesis of the *Volpini Suite*, see in the same volume, Heather Lemonedes, “Gauguin Becomes a Printmaker,” pp. 87–117; and *Volpini Suite*.

23

Scholars have suggested that the animals seen in this panel might be giraffes or antelopes; see, for example, André Cariou, *L'aventure de Pont-Aven et Gauguin*, exh. cat. (Skira, 2003), p. 134.

24

The album contains a few studies that can be definitively related to Martinique paintings. See Karen Kristine Rechnitzer Pope, “Gauguin and Martinique” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1981), pp. 115–18; and *The Sketchbooks*.

25

I am grateful to Ellen Lee, Chief Curator, Indianapolis Museum of Art, for this comparison.

26

Another possible comparison could be made to a seated figure located on the recto side of a page from the now disbound Martinique sketchbook, who wears a very similar broad-brimmed yellow hat. See Bern, *Galerie Kornfeld, Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, sale cat. (Galerie Kornfeld, Bern, June 17, 2001), lot 37. For an illustration of this sketchbook page, and for more on the Martinique sketchbook, see *The Sketchbooks*. My thanks to Harriet Stratis, Senior Research Conservator of Prints and Drawings, for this comparison.

27

See also a circa 1888 pen-and-ink drawing by Bernard, *Breton Women, Child and Goose (Project for a Wood Carving)* (Collection R. T., Brest) in Belinda Thomson, ed., *Gauguin's Vision*, with Frances Fowle and Lesley Stevenson, exh. cat. (National Galleries of Scotland, 2005), p. 59, fig. 69.

28

Indeed, Gauguin's experiments with “whittling wood rudely with brute force” (le bois qu'il taillait au couteau rudement et avec force) began with his years at sea as a merchant marine (1868–69); he took up woodcarving again in the 1880s, when he declared himself an artist. See Marcel Guérin, *L'oeuvre gravé de Gauguin*, vol. 1 (H. Floury, 1927), p. 12. Bernard, on the other hand, was a novice to the craft and medium, and he admitted that it was Gauguin who taught him how to carve wood to make “sculpture” (p. 12). Bernard received his first personal carving tools in 1891 from the comte de Rochefoucauld, who commissioned a corner cabinet (now at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, see fig. 21). Daniel Morane claimed that Bernard's first piece of furniture “à cinq panneaux” (with five panels) was for Mademoiselle de Swart, a friend of André Bonger, and made at Saint-Briac. “C'est la première fois dans ses lettres de 1891 qu'il est question d'un meuble sculpté ce qui exclut toute collaboration Bernard-Gauguin pour un meuble” (It is the first [mention in] his letters from 1891 of a carved piece of furniture that does not involve

a collaboration between Bernard–Gauguin), in Daniel Morane, *Émile Bernard, 1868–1941: Catalogue de l'oeuvre gravé*, exh. cat. (Musée de Pont-Aven/Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie—Jacques Doucet, 2000), p. 121, n. 18. Gauguin underscored his belief that Bernard was his apprentice in an unpublished article he wrote in the third person about his protégé. Gauguin claimed, “In 1888, pleased with Gauguin's suggestions, he [Bernard] tried using Gauguin's carving tools [gouges] also to make ‘bois sculptés’”; see “Notes sur Bernard,” appendix 2, in Henri Dorra, “Émile Bernard and Paul Gauguin,” *Gazette des beaux-arts* 45 (Apr. 1955), p. 260.

29

According to Fred Leeman, the entire top horizontal panel was carved by Bernard; see Fred Leeman, *Émile Bernard (1868–1941)*, with Béatrice Recchi-Altarrriba and Annie Champié (Wildenstein Institute/Citadelles & Mazenod, 2013), p. 140.

30

See Belinda Thomson, ed., *Gauguin's Vision*, with Frances Fowle and Lesley Stevenson, exh. cat. (National Galleries of Scotland, 2005), p. 59.

31

See Fred Leeman, *Émile Bernard (1868–1941)*, with Béatrice Recchi-Altarrriba and Annie Champié (Wildenstein Institute/Citadelles & Mazenod, 2013), p. 140.

32

In 2009 Jérôme Séré, a furniture restorer at the Atelier Régional de Restauration, Bignan, spent a week at the Art Institute of Chicago studying the construction of the cabinet and the decorative carving with museum conservators and curators. Participating in a three-day seminar with Séré (Aug. 17–20) were Francesca Cassadio, Mellon Senior Conservation Scientist; Inge Fiedler, Associate Research Microscopist; Emily Heye, Objects Conservator; Jill Shaw, former Research Associate; Julie Simek, Associate Painting Conservator; Kirk Vuillemot, Assistant Conservator for Preparation and Framing; and Frank Zuccari, Grainger Executive Director of Conservation. This group identified traditional furniture-making elements (such as the mortise-and-tenon corner joins with square pegs on the face frame and back frame, and lapped and pegged miter joins on the doors), as well as penciled inscriptions on the interior of the face frame that seem to indicate the order of assembly. The group noted as well less traditional and even unusual elements such as flush-mounted instead of overlay doors, and the fixed interior shelf. Séré's analysis of the construction and the thickness of the two unusual, glass-fronted door frames proved that, from the beginning, the cabinet was intended to have glass panels, dispelling a working hypothesis that the glass was a later addition to the 1888 construction. See Technical Study; and “Visit of Jérôme Séré, August 17–20, 2009,” photocopy in the curatorial object file, Department of European Painting and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago.

33

See René Trotel, *Le mobilier breton: Histoire et splendeurs d'un artisanat régional* (Coop Breizh, 2009), pp. 18, 57.

34

According to Estelle Guille des Buttes-Fresneau, Chief Conservator, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Pont-Aven, the village had one frame maker, a M. Le Corronc, who might have worked as a cabinetmaker as well; see Estelle Guille, email to Gloria Groom, Feb. 7, 2011, curatorial object file, Department of European Painting and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago. Perhaps it was Le Corronc who instructed the artists to leave a border around each panel to avoid shearing off the vulnerable edges. This precautionary step was not done properly in the top panel, again suggesting that Bernard was the author of at least part of it.

35

For the carved wooden clogs and cane, see Christopher Gray, *Sculpture and Ceramics of Paul Gauguin* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1963; repr., Hacker Art Books, 1980), pp. 1999, cat. 80 (ill.); 200, cat. 81 (ill.); 201, cat. 82 (ill.) and 83 (ill.). See also Martin Bailey, “Gauguin's Clogs,” *Burlington Magazine* 152, no. 1289 (Aug. 2010), pp. 540–43.

36

“Visit of Jérôme Séré, August 17–20, 2009,” photocopy in curatorial object file, Department of European Painting and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago. For more on how the rest of the cabinet was constructed and assembled, see Technical Study. For more on traditional furniture making in Brittany, see René Trotel, *Le mobilier breton: Histoire et splendeurs d'un artisanat régional* (Coop Breizh, 2009).

37
According to Jérôme Séré, a furniture restorer at the Atelier Régional de Restauration, Bignan, vermilion and red lead were typically used on furniture but not in this region. I am grateful to Inge Fiedler for her analysis of samples of these elements. Her results confirm that the green outer layer lies on top of the red layer (see Technical Study). See also René Trotel, *Le mobilier breton: Histoire et splendeurs d'un artisanat régional* (Coop Breizh, 2009), pp. 118–19.

38
Catherine Puget, former director of the Musée Pont-Aven, personal communication with Gloria Groom, July 28, 2008. I am grateful to Caroline Boyle-Turner for introducing me to Pont-Aven art historians and for sharing her vast knowledge of the region and its artists with me.

39
The 1889/90 design, *Project for the Decoration of a Bookcase*, includes notes from Gauguin within the areas that would correspond to the glass panels for two doors. These notes read, on the right side: “Meuble bibliothèque / Cet intérieur est destiné à une croisée vitrée (planche / au milieu pour mettre soit livres soit bibelots) / ferrures de charnières en fer si / c'est possible souples / à coquille et portes (bien polies) [drawing of a bisected oval] Boutons de porte en / Fer ditto [drawing of a circle] tout à / fait ronds / Croissés taillées en chanfrein” (Bookcase furniture. This interior is intended to have glass doors (shelf in between to put books or bibelots), iron hinges and if possible smooth [functioning] [and] shell-shaped and doors (polished well) [drawing of a bisected oval] Door knobs made of iron as above [drawing of a circle] perfectly round. Shelf shaped with a rounded front). The notes read, on the left side: “Coins bien nets— / hauteur 0,90 / largeur coffer 1 mètre 10 centimètres (1,10) / Hauteur de la plinthe 0,20 / Profondeur 0,65 / Les côtés seront faits de la même façon / que le devant mais non sculptés et / sans verre aux même proportions” (Corners neatly fitted—height 90 [cm], width 1 meter 10 centimeters [1.10], Height of the base 20, Depth 65 [cm] The sides will be made in the same way as the front but they will not be carved and [will be] without glass [but] in the same proportions). I am grateful to Sylvie Crussard and Marie-Christine Maufus, both of the Wildenstein Institute, Paris, for having provided me with a transcription of Gauguin's notes, which are too faint to be fully deciphered from available digital images.

40
For more on the large cupboard, see Richard R. Brettell and Stephen F. Eisenman, *Nineteenth-Century Art in the Norton Simon Museum*, vol. 1 (Norton Simon Art Foundation/Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 477–81, cat. 128 (ill.).

41
See also Settee (Gray 131), a wooden bench to which Gauguin added carved decorations during his final stay in Tahiti (1895–1901).

42
See *Collection du Docteur Gachet*, sale cat. (Hôtel Drouot, May 15, 1993), n.pag., lot 293. I am grateful to Travers Newton for bringing this to my attention.

43
For more on the zincographs that make up the Volpini Suite, see Heather Lemonedes, Belinda Thomson, and Agnieszka Juszcak, *Paul Gauguin: Paris, 1889*, with contributions by Chris Stolwijk and Moyna Stanton, exh. cat. (Cleveland Museum of Art/Van Gogh Museum/Hatje Cantz, 2009) and Volpini Suite.

44
Douglas Druick, “Material Perspectives: The Art Object, the Art Museum and the History of Art,” in Claire Barbillon, Catherine Chevillot, and Françoise-René Martin, *Histoire de l'art XIXe siècle (1848–1914): Bilans et perspectives* (École du Louvre, 2012), p. 275.

45
See Sylvie Crussard, Wildenstein Institute, Paris, to Maria Garriga, Juan Garriga, Angeles Garriga, and Manuel Garriga, Nov. 30, 1993, photocopy in the curatorial object file, Department of European Painting and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago. According to the Garriga family, Paul Sérusier gave the cabinet to Lluís Garriga Roig; see Jean-Marie Le Fell, Galerie Jean-Marie Le Fell, email to Gloria Groom, Sept. 4, 2008, curatorial object file, Department of European Painting and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago. André Cariou, Director, Musées de Beaux-Arts de Quimper, claimed that he first ran across the cabinet in the damp, dark space behind a vendor's stall at the Port de Cligancourt flea market, in the north of Paris. Personal communication with the author, Paris, Oct. 14, 2011. For more on Garriga Roig, see Ferran Sanz Lou, *La projecció internacional d'enric-cristòfol ricart com a gravado* (Fundació Privada Foment Vilanoví, 2010), pp. 89–90.

46
Ary Leblond, conservator, Musée de la France d'Outremer, to Monsieur Garriga, June 17, 1935, reproduced in *Tableaux et sculptures des XIXe et XXe siècles*, sale cat. (Tajan, Dec. 19, 2001), p. 10.