

# The Effect Of Paul Gauguin's Life On His Works In Different Stages

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**Abstract:** Paul Gauguin is an outstanding artist. He has a unique style of painting, so he has been one of three most famous post-impressionism painters. There are four stages in his life, His works have different characteristics in every stage. His yearning for the primitive life and his special experiences had a great impact on his artistic career. This paper analyzes the influence of his life experiences on his painting.

## 1. Introduction

Paul Gauguin's art style is rough and wild, and the formation of this style depends on his life experience. During his fifty-five years of life, his painting style grows up and goes through four important periods.

## 2. Gauguin's life

### 2.1. Childhood and youth

On June 17, 1848, Gauguin was born at 52 Notre Dame de Lorette Avenue, Paris, France. Because of economic reasons, he moved to Lima, Peru with his family in 1851<sup>[1]</sup>. Peru was a backward country at that time, so primitive tribes and unique primitive customs still existed in many areas of Peru during those years. What he saw and heard about those special cultures in his childhood had a great influence on his future creations.

At 1855, Paul came back to France with his mother. As he got older, he became a sailor and retired at 1871<sup>[2]</sup>. For his mother's death, Gustav Arosa, the friend of his mother became his guardian. Gustav Arosa was an appreciative collector and art lover who affected him a lot on his later life. He not only helped Paul find a good job, but also was Paul's guide to the road of art. He presented his collection to Paul and developed Paul's interest in art.

During Paul's childhood and youth, he showed great artistic talent. When he studied in primary school, his sculpture got highly praised. His teacher described him that he could be very successful or very poor in the future because he was absolutely not a normal people. When Paul was nine years old, he watched a painting about traveler. He liked this painting very much. He had many strange "travel" dreams, and this magic painting fitted his dream. After several years, his sailor career also coincided with his dreams.

In these periods, Paul showed his desire to travel, he longed for the life of itinerant travels. These thought impacted his later lifestyle and his artistic creations. On the other hand, both the primitive customs and primitive tribes which he saw in Peru and his experience during sailor career influenced his aesthetic judgment.

### 2.2. Impressionist Period

In 1871, he began to learn painting while he got a job as a securities broker. He fell in love and got married with his wife in 1873. After three months, he got acquainted with a famous painter Pizarro. Guided by Pizarro, he also began collecting impressionist paintings.

Since 1876, he had been practicing drawing on all his rest days. Through Pizarro's help and his own efforts, he has made rapid progress<sup>[3]</sup>. His interest in painting was increasing day by day. With

the help of Pizarro, he participated in the Independent Artists Exhibition and the fifth and sixth Impressionist Exhibition (No. 10 Pyramid Street). After these exhibitions, he became a famous impressionist painter.

During these years, Pizarro's appreciation and teaching played a great role in him. Without Pizarro's recommendation and help, he could not enter the impressionist circle<sup>[4]</sup>. Meanwhile, his paintings gradually developed their own style, but his unique painting skills have not yet been shown. At this stage, he was influenced by Pizarro, so his works had a significant neo-impressionism style. Picture 1 is an example of his work at this time.



Take his 1884 work, < Mrs. Gauguin in evening dress > as an example, his painting style in this period was greatly influenced by neo-impressionism. In this painting, He used rich colors to portray his beautiful and dignified wife. This is significantly different from the simple color blocks and object shapes he describes in the future.

Picture 1 Mrs. Gauguin in evening dress

### 2.3. Gradual Disengagement from Impressionism

In 1881, Paul Gauguin resigned from work, so as to be able to paint all day. In the next year, he took part in the seventh Impressionist Exhibition, but Claude Monet, the most famous impressionist, did not want Paul's painting in the exhibition. After the debate between Pizarro and Monet, Paul's painting was finally selected. Since then, there has been some controversy among the impressionists about Paul's paintings<sup>[5]</sup>. In 1886, Paul attended the eighth Impressionist Exhibition. It was after this exhibition that he broke with impressionism<sup>[6]</sup>. In the same year, he went to Brittany in northwest France. Brittany was a region with distinctive ethnic characteristics. For Paul, the exoticism of his childhood memories began to awaken. It had some effect on him, his style of painting gradually changed. A year later, He went to an island called Tabuga at the mouth of Panama where he lived and painted like a savage. The experiences further influenced his understanding of art, and his painting style was changing more and more. The vision after the Sermon (Jacob wrestling with the angel) is his representative work during this period.



The Vision after the Sermon (Jacob wrestling with the Angel) 1888

It can be seen that he used more and more single and pure colors in painting, and his descriptions of the shapes of objects became more and more concise. Most of his paintings were painted in warm colors during this period.

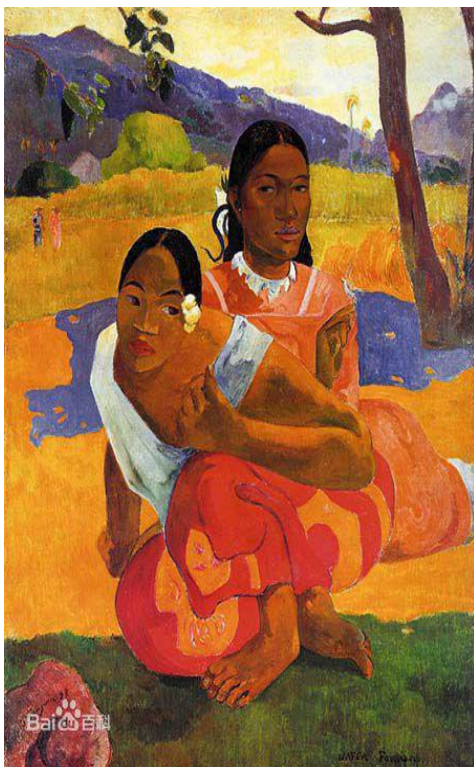
Picture 2 The vision after the Sermon (Jacob wresting with the angel)

At this period, because of the break with impressionism and the change of his living environment, the neo-impressionist style in his paintings became less and less. His special personal style gradually took shape.

#### 2.4. “Tahiti” period

In 1892, Paul came to Tahiti for the first time, and he painted there whole year<sup>[7]</sup>. Then he came back to France because of poverty. In 1894, he traveled to Brussels and the next year he came back to Paris. He hated life in those years, so he went to Tahiti again and began to live there.

Tahiti had been previously ruled by the Maori, and then was colonized by France. As a result, the customs of the primitive tribes remained on the island, meanwhile modern technology was also introduced. For this reason, the island was a suitable place for Paul to live. He found his spiritual home there<sup>[8]</sup>, and his own style of painting was completely awakened. On this island, his longing for primitive life was released and he created many meaningful works. Picture 3 is the one of the most representative works in this stage.



The style of his works in this period is very unique. In this picture, the color is very simple, and the style is very similar to decorative painting. The color of this picture has some religious overtones, because Paul was largely influenced by the primitive civilization, and most of the original murals recorded religious sacrifices

Picture 3 When do you get married?

### 3. Influence of His Life Experience on His works

Paul Gauguin has always been adrift all his life. He was often of no fixed abode and had unusual life experience which had a great influence on his works in different stages during his life. Through his whole life, the customs of Peru, sailor's experience and what he had seen and heard in Tahiti made him become an opponent of impressionism. Paul's painting style developed into the expression of desires that were endless, savage, and crazy. As a result, his works were full of burning hope and boundless vitality. When he lived in Tahiti, he replaces narrative descriptions with certain allusions and symbols and his works changed perspective, light and shadow, three-dimensional, modeling and other painting laws into the freedom expression of the plane.

In Tahiti, Paul was deeply touched by Tahiti's local customs, meanwhile his paintings transform to a special style which has strong visual shock. He created his paintings with bright and warm colors, and these colors were evenly spread over a large area. This style was quite different from the style of impressionism which emphasizes on light and shadow.

In terms of artistic expression, Paul pays more attention to the abstract expression of real life. Judging from his work in Tahiti, he adopted a similar decorative painting style to voice the author's own feelings.

Detached art was not existing, Paul Gauguin's artistic style cannot be divorced from his life experience. Under the influence of his rich life experience, he created the art full of wildness and created the myth of the art world.

### 4. Conclusion

Paul Gauguin was an outstanding artist, and his influence on succeeding generations is enormous. At different times in his life, his understanding and creation of art were different because of his different experiences and guidance. To sum up, his life can be divided into four stages, childhood and youth, impressionist period, gradual disengagement from impressionism and "Tahiti" period. In these stages, his desire for primitive life was gradually satisfied and his spiritual world was gradually mature, so he created great works.

From Gauguin's own experience, his life was a legend. He inspired art and freedom during his whole life so his works filled with enthusiastic feeling. His life was lonely and brilliant and many life philosophies spread by his painting. Maybe in life, he was a poor man, but he was a rich artist in art.

His lifestyle and thoughts, as well as the expression of emotions in his works, promoted the development of art and the emergence of some art genre in the future.

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