

## Artist in Paradise

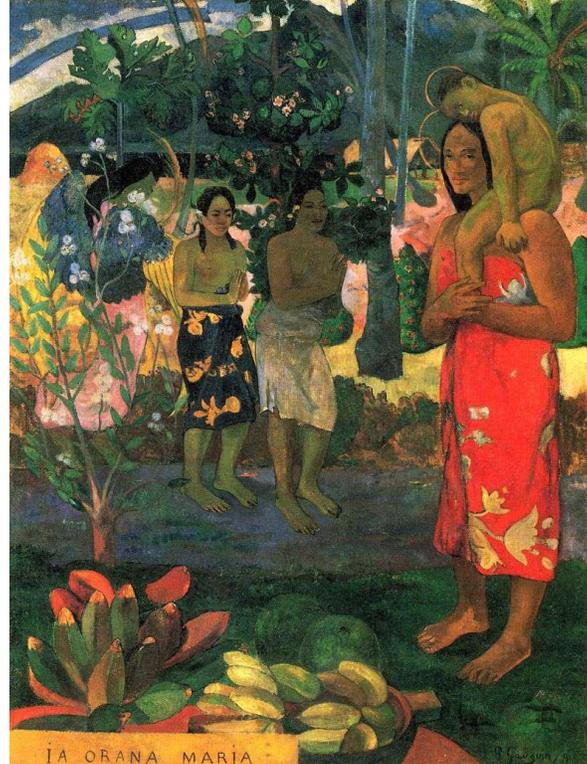
*Gauguin in the South Seas*

Melora Cann

**Meet the artists:** Paul Gauguin

**Meet the subject:** La Orana Maria (Ave Maria) is an 1891 oil on canvas painting by Paul Gauguin, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is one of the first works in his Tahitian period, showing two Polynesians greeting the Madonna and Child.

**6 Pages**



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*Gauguin in the South Seas (continued)*

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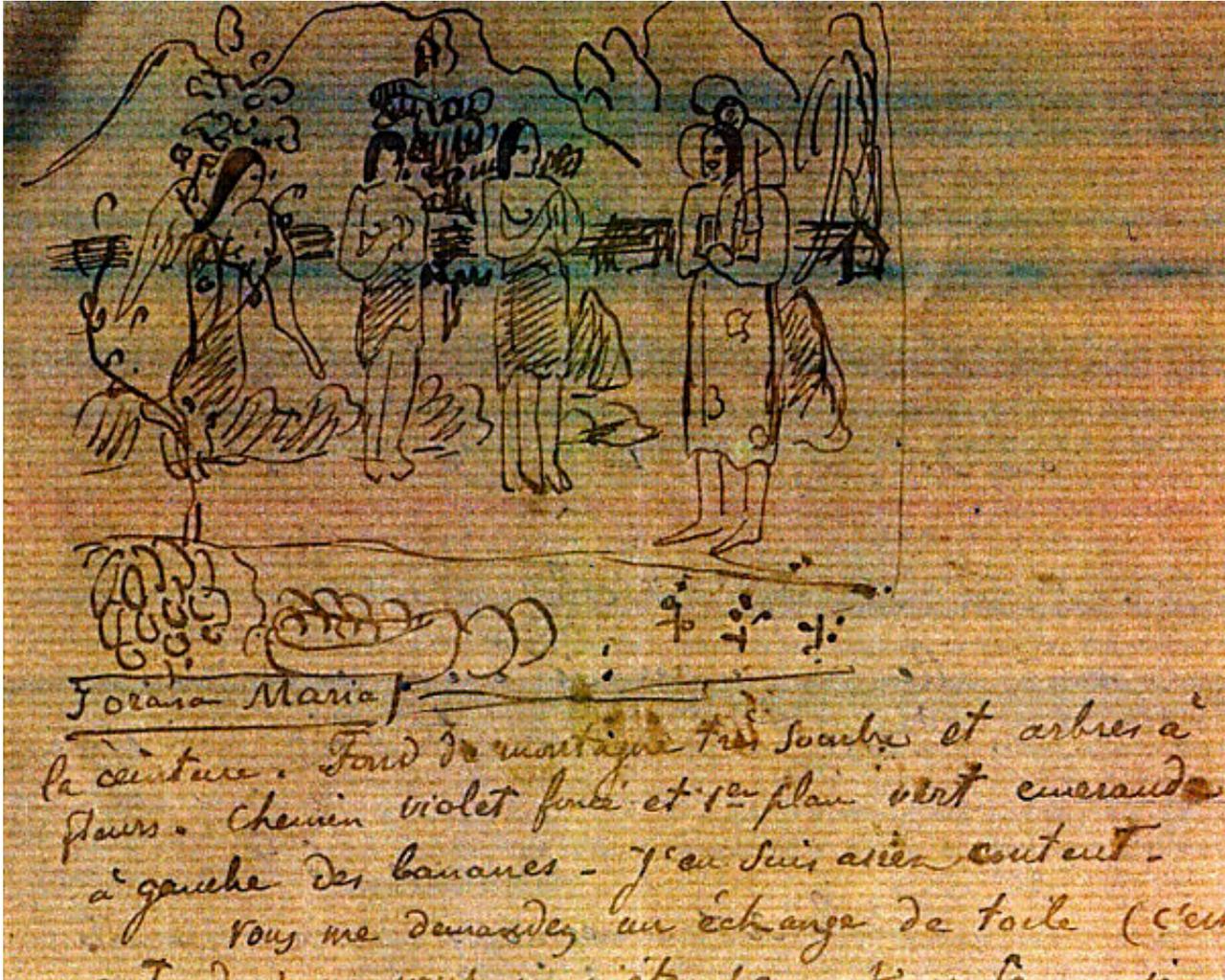


La Orana Maria (Ave Maria) 1891 oil on canvas painting by Paul Gauguin

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Gauguin in the South Seas (continued)

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Letter from Gauguin about Orana

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## *Gauguin in the South Seas (continued)*

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### Meet the subject:

La Orana Maria (Ave Maria) is an 1891 oil on canvas painting by Paul Gauguin, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is one of the first works in his Tahitian period, showing two Polynesians greeting the Madonna and Child. Before beginning a series of pictures that showed references to Polynesian religious beliefs, Gauguin focused this, first Tahitian painting on the most central of Christian themes, Mary with the infant Jesus. From Tahiti, Paul Gauguin wrote to his friend Daniel de Monfreid in Paris on March 11, 1892, that he had finished one canvas, besides his sketches and studies. He described La Orana Maria as “a size 50 canvas [a standard-size canvas that Gauguin had brought with him on his first trip to Tahiti]. An angel with yellow wings reveals Mary and Jesus, Tahitians just the same, to two Tahitian women—nudes dressed in pareus, a sort of cotton cloth printed with flowers that can be draped as one likes from the waist. Very somber mountainous background and flowering trees. Dark violet path and emerald green foreground, with bananas at left.—I’m rather happy with it” (Gauguin 1892, translated in Stuckey 1988). \*

### The Artist:

Paul Gauguin (1848 – 1903) was a French post-Impressionist artist. Unrecognized in the art world until after his death, Gauguin is now honored for his experimental use of color and synthetist style that were very different from Impressionism. His work was influential to later modern artists such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. Gauguin’s art became fashionable after his death, partly because of efforts by art dealer Ambroise Vollard.

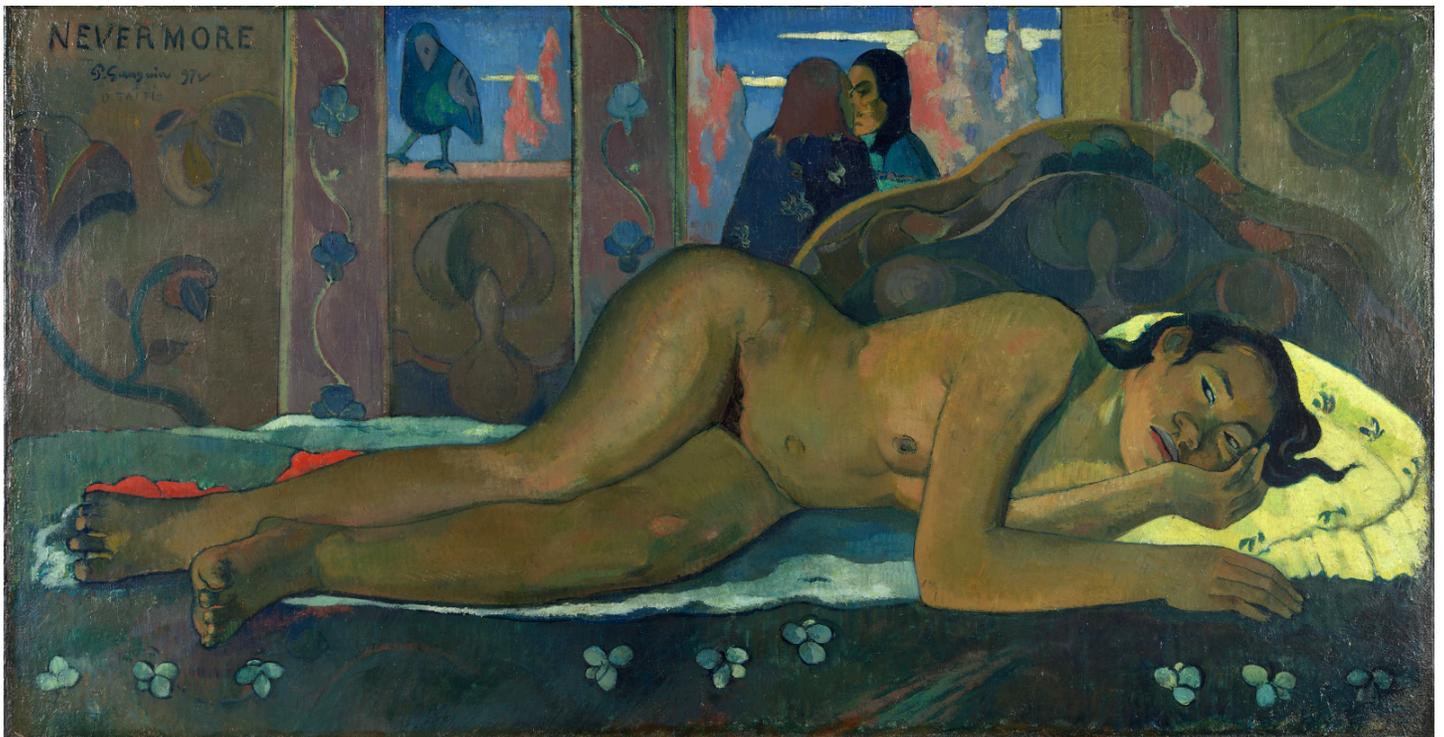
He spent the last ten years of his life in French Polynesia, and most of his paintings from this period reflect the natural beauty of the place, the culture and the people. Gauguin would remain in the Marquesas Islands from 1901 until his death there in 1903, never to return to his wife and five children, who had retreated to his wife’s native Denmark.

In these exotic ports of call Gauguin freed his art from the here and now, creating a personal reality from his imagination and from his dreams, in brightly colored, highly abstract paintings depicting native life. Above, ‘Nevermore’ (1897), with his model, Pahura, who was his ‘vahiné’ (Tahitian wife). *From retrospective catalog at the Met:* [\\*https://www.metmuseum.org/art/met-publications/The\\_Lure\\_of\\_the\\_Exotic\\_Gauguin\\_in\\_New\\_York\\_Collections](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/met-publications/The_Lure_of_the_Exotic_Gauguin_in_New_York_Collections)

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*Gauguin in the South Seas (continued)*

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'Nevermore' (1897), with his model, Pahura, who was his 'vahiné' (Tahitian wife).

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## *Gauguin in the South Seas (continued)*

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### **Curious fact:**

After a series of weeks working side-by-side and a violent argument with Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh cut off part of one ear.

### **More info-bites:**

- Although born in Europe, he grew up in Peru, joined the merchant marine in his teens and visited South America, India, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the North Sea.
- He started working in the Paris Bourse and became a successful stockbroker, he only switched to painting after the stock market crashed in 1882.
- “What does it matter that I set myself apart from other people? For most I shall be an enigma, but for a few I shall be a poet ...,” he wrote.

### **How he did it:**

He followed his own path as an untrained artist, making friends with professional artists and art dealers, exploring oil painting, ceramic arts and printmaking. The synthetism style of painting evolved from works by Paul Gauguin and others in the 1880s emphasized two-dimensional flat patterns, bold, unmediated patches of color interrupted by flat lines, thus breaking with Impressionist art and theory. The style shows a conscious effort to work less directly from nature and to rely more upon memory. This would, in turn, become related to the symbolism in poetry and philosophy, in art symbolism would rely on mythological and dream imagery. The symbols used by symbolism were intensely personal, private, obscure and ambiguous. He believed firmly in his difference, often referring to himself as a savage.

### **Want to learn more?**

#### **Visit YouTube and watch:**

Paul Gauguin – In his own words (14 minutes)

Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=5&v=\\_6qdlAHsFg&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=_6qdlAHsFg&feature=emb_logo)

Exhibition at the National Gallery in London (2+ minutes):

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPwmyavGZh4>

Paul Gauguin. Brief biography and artwork (5 minutes)

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW3v3pK-QvU>