

Museum Guide



Ground floor



Hello and welcome

You may already know that this was previously the annexe of a hotel, The Hotel Julia... It's a four-storey building: your visit will take you to a room on the first floor, then on to the permanent collections on the third floor. So here you are, just like the traveller or artist who came to our town thirsting for new landscapes and colours...

To start the visit, take the stairs or the lift to the first floor and the Julia room, which was previously the hotel dining-room.

And we hope to be able to make you feel here the particular vibrations born from their work, so deeply etched in the Pont-Aven environment.





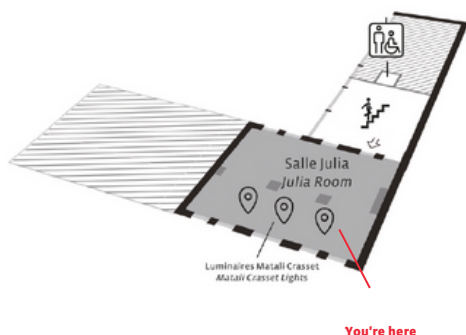
1st floor

Julia Room



1st floor

Julia Room



So here is the place where meals were eaten at the Hotel Julia. This room has retained its original style, but is not always accessible as it is also used for events and receptions.

Remember that this was the hotel annexe: more modern and functional than the main hotel which had become too small. It was situated on the Place Julia, formerly the Place du Marché. When the annexe was completed in 1881, it seemed, with its steel frame, to have the modernity of a Chicago skyscraper. It had all the refinements of the late 19th century – comfortable furniture, electricity, cooled water...

The atmosphere of this dining-room, so modern at the 19th century, was also warm as a good as household where everything were done for the well-being of guests... just like the very enterprising proprietor, Julia Guillou.



Photography of Julia Guillou

Mademoiselle Julia is a character of Pont-Aven who hosted many artists; a bronze statue of her is in the square which now bears her name. On the upper floors of this annexe were the bedrooms and studios of painters... So, let's go up to explore these rooms on the third floor, which house the works of the permanent collection nowadays.

1st floor

The Artistic 1%

As part of the museum's renovation project in 2014, the French designer Matali Crasset was selected by the Pont-Aven Museum to design, as part of the 1% artistic, the 3 chandeliers that adorn the Julia room.



The creation of Matali Crasset, an internationally renowned French artist, is intimately part of the history of the place and respectful of the new museum designed by the architects. Designed against the foot of the traditional chandelier, the designer's lights take the form of domes that contain interior sub-spaces. Once projected by the light on the ground, these generate chromatic circles. The chandeliers represent one of the principles of the Pont-Aven school, synthetism, which advocates a return to the essentials of form. The work of Matali Crasset and that of the painters thus share the geometry of forms, the partitioning of planes, and the elimination of details to keep only the essentials.

No superfluous frills and ornaments: here the structure of the dome tends to be forgotten and becomes a source of light in itself. The chandeliers, 120 cm in diameter, are complemented by hand-woven wool carpets, placed on the floor, directly inspired by the palette of the painters exhibited in the museum's collections. The designer has developed the parallel with the history of the school to the point of making reference, in her creation, to the audacity of Julia Guillou who, at the time of the painters, had equipped her hotel with large and bright windows of artists' studios.

Let's go up to the 3rd floor to discover the works of the permanent collection. The second floor is devoted to temporary exhibitions.



3rd floor

Permanent collection of the museum

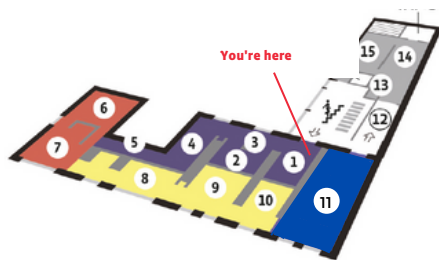


3rd floor - Room 1

Why Pont-Aven?

Artists do not come to Pont-Aven solely for the comfortable lodgings... There is something else in this part of Brittany... Although there are few paintings of the region before 1830, there are earlier references to the pretty village of Pont-Aven, to its romantic valley, to its interest to artists... Jacques Cambry, for example, from the end of the 18th century, writes in his **Journey to Finistère** that “*around Pont-Aven, especially in the town itself, there are one hundred oddities of which an artist can make studies*”

Then Thomas Trollope, the English traveller, explored the area in his turn in 1837 and evoked the majesty of a virgin landscape mixed with druidic and religious influences so favourable to a painter...



However, many Breton villages are just as picturesque; but at Pont-Aven there is a constant bustle with the harbour linking the worlds of the countryside and the sea; this goes some way to explain this place's attraction... Furthermore, the arrival in 1863 of the railway at Quimperlé enabled Parisians to visit the valley easily – in a few hours travel they were in another world, another culture with authentic costumes and traditions...

Then, coming back to the story of lodgings, painters stayed in Pont-Aven quite simply because they could find lodgings, unlike in other small towns where there were no inns...

3rd floor - Room 1

Iconic sites

Certain sites in Pont-Aven became ineluctable icons, they were such favoured subjects of painters... The bell-tower of the church of Saint Joseph, for example, in the middle of the village, appears in a number of works. As does Notre-Dame de Trémalo chapel, reached by crossing the Wood of Love (Bois d'amour) , another favourite inspiration for painters.

The wood borders the river Aven and the tree-lined promenade has become a real subject for artists. It can be seen on the 1883 painting by Marie Luplau entitled **The Wood of Love (Bois d'Amour) at Pont-Aven.**

Marie Luplau was Danish, she was a committed feminist who was part of the Scandinavian colony of the village. This is the oldest painting by a female artist in the Museum of Pont-Aven. It was common for foreign artists to train in Parisian studios then to seek places to continue to work in the summer – Brittany was one such destination.



Her painting is realist in style, like those of Jules-Bastien Lepage – relatively dark, with particular attention given to the detail of the foliage and the contrasts of the light. Marie Luplau liked to paint from nature – from a sketch taken from life, she finished work in the studio.

In the centre of Pont-Aven some iconic places are also to be found: the triangular plaza opening in front of the museum which housed the market and, of course, the harbour, represented here in two paintings. This anonymous work, realist in technique, from the 1880s depicts a scene of coastal navigation. **The Harbour of Pont-Aven** is by Gaston Roullet, who was an official artist of the French Navy and very well-travelled.

3rd floor - Room 1



The fore-runners

The forerunners, the discoverers of Pont-Aven so to speak, were American. Henry Bacon, a young painter who visited Brittany in 1864, was enchanted by the beauty of the place and wasted no time sharing it with Robert Wylie and Charles Way, who came in their turn.

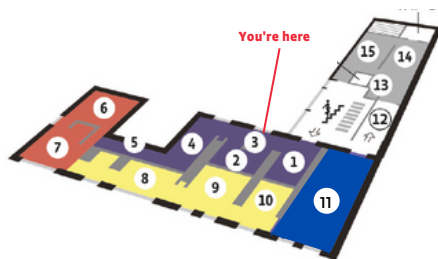
It is true that this strange landscape of chaotic hills by the sea, extending into a beautiful wooded valley has the capacity to fascinate... As well as the river-mouth port which lives to the rhythm of the tides... It should also be noted that at that time there was a general explosion of interest in Brittany – for some people Celtic traditions suddenly seemed more stylish than the classical Greek and Roman worlds, despite the important archaeological digs going on at that time. They sought the authenticity which seemed on the point of disappearing in the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution...

The painters were drawn to Cornouaille as much for its rocky coastline and its megaliths as for its pilgrimage parades and traditional costumes.

The summer of 1866 is the real birthdate of Pont-Aven's artistic colony: a dozen painters, 7 of whom were Americans, 2 French and 2 English, take up residence in Pont-Aven. Robert Wylie decided to stay on beyond summer – he stayed all year round and became the central figure of the American colony. Pont-Aven's fame quickly spread to the Parisian studios and the genre scenes created in the village enjoyed their first successes. In this space a self-portrait of Robert Wylie completed after 1870, shows him towards the end of his life. He died prematurely at 38 years old in 1878 – but he had the time to initiate an incredible influx to Pont-Aven whose echo was felt as far away as Philadelphia in the United States. In summer 1875 there were between 40 and 50 artists living in the village. It was seen as a genuine open-air art studio. We had to wait until 1888 and Paul Gauguin for real innovation to develop, but that's getting ahead of ourselves.

3rd floor - Room 2

inns and boarding-houses



This influx of painters had consequences beyond just artistic and cultural exchanges... it also represented an economic asset for the inhabitants, as everyone had to be lodged and fed. They quickly got to grips with it by renting rooms and barns for studios... Have a good look at the glazed frameworks of these studios during your walks in Pont-Aven.

There were already three hotels in the town from the middle of the 1860s. Before settling in the Hotel Julia, Robert Wylie and his friends had moved into The Hotel des Voyageurs, the biggest and most expensive too. There was also The Lion d'Or, a bit less expensive and the Pension Gloanec guesthouse, the most modest, which some described as "the real bohemian house" ... Julia Guillou worked at The Hotel des Voyageurs from 1870; she became very close to Wylie who, moreover, is buried at Pont-Aven in her family vault... She bought the hotel in 1878 and gave it the name The Hotel Julia and built this annexe in 1881.



Thus the employee became the proprietress... and businesswoman! The modernity and enterprising spirit of this miller's daughter were exceptional. She put carriages at her clients' disposal to take them to the seaside, she sold tickets to visit the Wood of Love (Bois d'Amour) , and organised painting lessons at the hotel, given by Frank Penfold.

On your visit to the museum here you will notice as you go that the restored windows of the studios are still visible. Here, as in the other inns, the walls were covered with works left as a tribute, some of which are works by those whose names have gone down in history. Look at this oil on board from The Hotel Julia - The Undergrowth at Pont-Aven painted from life by Jules Girardet, an artist of Swiss origin. Of the other inn-keepers of Pont-Aven, we must also mention Marie-Jeanne Gloanec who ran the guesthouse of the same name... Her generosity and openness to the artistic world are legendary - at her place she gave credit... The atmosphere was very festive and fertile on an artistic level.

The inscription, "Gloanec Tribe at Port-Manech" has disappeared today. Here we find an idealised vision of the painter's profession, combining work and relaxation - folding easels and parasols, but also picnic blankets and guests in lubricious poses. Fernand Quignon is known for his work using light to create atmosphere - it's all the more surprising to find on this sign that the shadows are projected in different directions. With Otto Hagborg we have real scenes of daily life as if drawn from life like **The Joinery Workshop at Pont-Aven** of 1888.



3rd floor - Room 2

Objects on display

The earthenware bust by Louis-Henri Nicot, a Breton sculptor, represents Janedik Cueff. The Cueffs were a married couple of bards and singers who performed, on several occasions, the works of Theodore Botrel, author of the famous Paimpolaise. The painter Émile Bernard whose career in Pont-Aven we will soon explore, created the portrait of Janedik Cueff, one of the last women in Pont-Aven to wear the headdress.



3rd floor - Room 4

Relations with the population of Pont-Aven

Straight away the population of Pont-Aven extended a warm welcome to the artists. They fitted in naturally, wearing berets, pea-jackets and the sailors' striped jumpers, and they praised the elegance of the women in their traditional costumes.

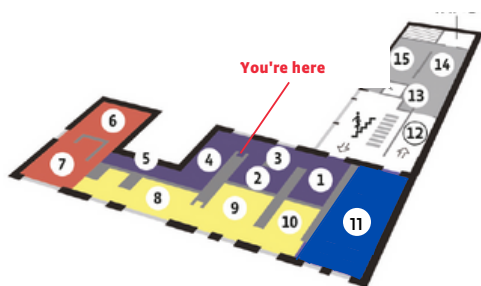
It helped that the Pontaventists were francophone too, speaking more than just Breton. That enabled exchanges and collaborations – the locals were happy to pose as models at prices unheard of in Paris, or even for free like this young girl painted by Henry Mosler. Furthermore, Breton families also commissioned portraits. Thus **the Portrait of Marie-Anne Herlédan**, painted around 1885 by Van den Anker was commissioned by the son of the model. In it the influence of Dutch painting can be seen in the lighting of the face and hands.



Hermanus- Franciscus Van den Anker, *Marie-Anne Herlédan*, 1885.

3rd floor - Room 4

Painted components in the guest-houses and studios



We know little about the painted panelling and panels of the studios and inns of Pont-Aven today beyond their written descriptions. The triptych studio door, an anonymous work, representing from top to bottom, **The Seaweed Collection, The Aven and Pont-Aven Harbour from the Quay**, dates from around 1890 to 1895.



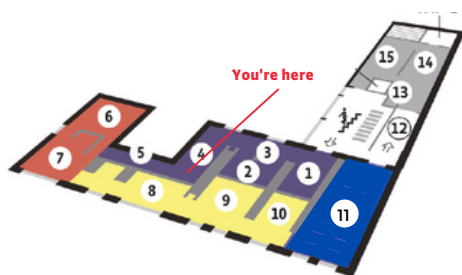
With its technique of little touches of light, this work is of Impressionist inspiration. It was found in a studio which had been rented to artists on the hills of Keramprechec.

Nearby, the panel by Arthur Dow, an American artist influenced by classical Japanese art, who became curator of the Fine Art Museum of Boston, displays a sketch of a woman's face, a crucifix and a handwritten inscription. Gauguin liked to stay at the Pension Gloanec.

Gauguin... It's time to turn to the man who, from 1886, wrote a new unmissable page in the artistic history of Pont-Aven.

3rd floor - Room 5

Gauguin's career before Pont-Aven



What was Paul Gauguin's career before arriving in Pont-Aven?

Born in Paris in 1848, grandson of Flora Tristan, he joined the navy at an early age, before becoming a stockbroker. He discovered painting through his tutor, Gustave Arosa, an art-collector and friend of artists. At this period of his life his income was such that he could start his own collection, primarily of impressionist pieces. He took to painting passionately under the aegis of his master, Camille Pissaro. Self-taught, he painted at first during his leisure time and attended the Colarossi private academy in Paris. He exhibited for the first time in the Salon of 1876 and decided at the end of that same year to devote himself to his art full-time. But his canvases, which continued to be in an impressionist style, hardly sold and he had to take some work in the banking sector. Following the 1882 bank crash he was let go and his financial situation deteriorated to such an extent that he became a fly-poster at night at the Gare du Nord in Paris...

It was probably through Fernand Quignon and Claude-Emile Schuffenecker that he heard tell of the artistic community of Pont-Aven and the Pension Gloanec, where you could live on credit while awaiting better days. It is true that financial difficulties contributed to his exile... but he also felt that his inspiration was exhausted. In 1886 he took refuge in this Breton village for the first time.

He was older than the others and quickly became a central figure... He turned away from Impressionism and his very personal theories revolutionised this colony of artists which had been academically inclined up to this point.





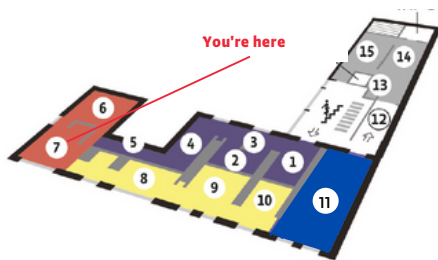
Works by his closest friends are exhibited here: Schuffenecker, Monfreid, Maufra ... Sometimes mocked, but often admired, he became more and more radical in his approach to painting as well as to engraving, sculpture and ceramics. During his second stay in Pont-Aven in 1888 his momentous meeting with Émile Bernard and the start of his innovation that opened a new route for modern painting – an aesthetic is developed which will take the name Synthetism... It's in Pont-Aven that Paul Gauguin finds the wherewithal to renew his art and modify his creative position.

He wrote to Schuffenecker, *"Near the sea I live like a peasant by the name of wild... I love Brittany. I find wildness and the primitive there. When I hear the sound of my clogs on granite I hear the muffled, dull, powerful sound I seek in painting."* At the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris he exhibited at the Café Volpini, under the auspices of the "Impressionist and Synthetist Group", a series of zincographies. He returned to Pont-Aven from 1889 to 1890, then in 1894, before leaving France for good for the South Sea Islands which he had already visited several times.

Room 6 is a thematic cabinet presenting in particular prints from our collection. The exhibition in this room changes several times a year.

3rd floor - Room 7

The Lesson in the Wood of Love



What art historians call « *The Lesson in the Wood of Love* » was given by Paul Gauguin to Paul Sérusier. When the two men met for the first time, Sérusier showed Gauguin a canvas where he had endeavoured to represent the nuances of the rusty colours of the ferns in autumn. Gauguin, who was then exploring the power of pure colour, asked him why he had not simply painted them in scarlet... and took him down by the River Aven to explain his theories live on the spot. On the 6 October 1888, on the road alongside the river in the Wood of Love, Sérusier painted, under Gauguin's direction, a landscape where he was asked to paint what he saw, not with precision, but as he felt it.

Thus, the trees take on a brilliant yellow, the shadows a deep ultramarine, the leaves are red... This is the essence of Synthetism, painting pure flatly positioned colours, reinforcing the simplification of a two-dimensional representation. In addition, that same year Gauguin wrote to Schuffenecker, "One piece of advice, don't work too close to nature, art is an abstraction, draw it from nature while dreaming ahead, and think more about the creation than the result."

Sérusier headed back off to Paris with his little painting on a wooden panel. For some of his fellow students at the Académie Julian where he was studying, it was a revelation. Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, Henri Gabriel Ibels and Paul Ranson with whom he later formed the Nabis were impressed by this synthetically reconfigured landscape. The painting was later named *The Talisman*. Nowadays it is one of the masterpieces of the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. An interactive system allows you to explore further this work which directly inspired the colours of the hanging spaces of this museum. You are also welcome to use the sound terminals to hear extracts of Gauguin's correspondence with other artists.



Paul Sérusier, *Le Talisman*, 1888.
(Musée d'Orsay)

3rd floor - Room 7

Can we speak of a Pont-Aven school ?

From 1888, something different was going on around the figure of Gauguin. Even in 1886 he was boasting about creating the sun and the rain in Pont-Aven in a letter to his wife, there is not *"one artist who resists my convictions..."* he wrote. He is on a collision course with the academicians as he turned towards painters who sought innovation and he took on the role of mentor to young painters like Paul Sérusier and Emile Bernard...

However, this alignment is not really that of a master surrounded by his pupils – it's more that of a group of artists, Gauguin at the centre, who feed off each other, sharing ideas and theories which are peripheral to official and academic teachings.

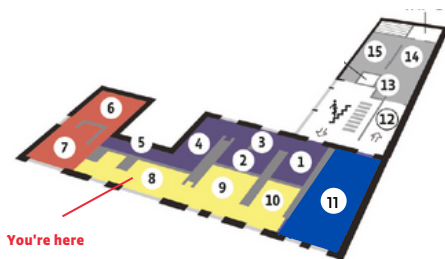
The name, the School of Pont-Aven, was only later used to define this group of some 20 painters which Gauguin, in this small Breton market-town, influenced unshakably over the period from 1888 to 1898... Among them were Charles Filiger, Meijer de Haan, Claude-Émile Schuffenecker, Armand Seguin, Wladyslaw Slewinski...



They share a certain aesthetics in their collaborations, but they are painters with very different horizons, of diverse nationalities and not all of whom shared the Synthetism route of Gauguin – some would remain Impressionist in style, others would return to classicism. But all, will have acquired from Pont-Aven, *"the right to dare all"* in the words of Gauguin and paved the way for modern painting...

3rd floor - Room 8

Paul Sérusier



Let's focus on Paul Sérusier whom we have already encountered in discussing **The Talisman**. The painting, **The Piglets**, created in 1889 is in the style of the School of Pont-Aven. The subject is represented flatly, with a simple line and the composition is based on two zones of clear colours which are opposed to each other – warm colours and cold colours.

This really is the domain of feeling rather than representation. The audacious framing is also notable – the upper body of the woman is truncated. This original freedom, unseen in that era, is shared by Gauguin ... **Interior at Pont-Aven** by Sérusier is a work which dates from 1888 – it could be the Pension Gloanec, we cannot be certain, but we know that Sérusier arrived in Pont-Aven in 1888 and painted this fairly Academic work before he met Gauguin.

A third piece by Sérusier shows us the evolution of a Pont-Aven painter from the moment his links with the group are broken. After the revelation of **The Talisman** and his participation in the Nabis movement, his palette changed in the 1890s – he no longer uses pure colours, but breaks them with greys. This can be seen in *Little Breton Girl Seated* of 1895. This features Marie Franciscaille who we see in a study for the portrait also exhibited here. Sérusier is then living in Châteauneuf-du-Faou and drew his inspiration from its inhabitants. In 1921 he published ABC of Painting, summarising his experiments and developing a theory of simple curves and a method of researching dull colours.

3rd floor - Room 8

Émile Bernard

We cannot discuss Émile Bernard without mentioning the key meeting, both for Paul Gauguin and for Pont-Aven. In 1886, young Émile, then only 18 years old, undertook a tour of Brittany on foot. He passed through Concarneau where he met Claude-Émile Schuffenecker who encouraged him to go and see Gauguin in Pont-Aven.

His welcome is far from warm. Gauguin more or less ignores Bernard, perhaps because the latter is not a fully-fledged artist and is still under the influence of the Impressionists, just as Gauguin is losing interest in them. It's a sort of bad first date, but one which at least allowed Bernard to discover Pont-Aven in full artistic boom and to drive him to personal researches which would lead him away from Impressionist influences.

Back in Paris he frequented Van Gogh and, more importantly, Louis Anquetin, with whom he developed in 1887 a style they called "Cloisonnisme" (partitionism) – simple forms juxtaposed in blocks of colour, outlined with a dark line as in stained glass, a style of painting where representation of depth is not important. The outlines were important as they figure significantly in Synthetism, even if it is difficult to detect in **The Talisman**.



Having explored this new route, Émile Bernard could at last genuinely dialogue with Gauguin on his return in 1888... The fruit of their advanced joint theories came when he painted Breton **Women in the Green Meadow**, which delighted Gauguin. Gauguin himself took the exercise further in **The Vision of the Sermon**. And in the autumn the lesson in the Wood of Love happened... This was indeed the year when Synthetism was born.

The Buckwheat by Émile Bernard, a study for which we see here bathed in red, is a kind of counterpoint to Breton **Women in the Green Meadow** – still these pure colours, born from the emotional memory of the scene, rather than the reality of it. This is also found in Pont-Aven **Landscape with Poplars**, a watercolour, also from 1888. In **The Bathers**, the direction is less radical – Émile had certainly seen Cézanne's painting of the same name when he undertook this, for its influence is there for all to see.

3rd floor - Room 8

Ceramics and the Chromatic Circle

While we are on the subject of colour, have a look at this chromatic circle. It's Paul Sérusier's and it's easy to imagine that it was fundamental to the research for *ABC of Painting* in 1921 – or all his artistic research!

As we see he has grey in the centre of the circle, dating from his time at Châteauneuf-du-Faou: he explained then that the use of varied greys in a painting creates feelings of harmony and peace.

He also believed that warm and cold colours should never be mixed, think back to **The Piglets**, which we saw earlier... For, according to him, pigments always contain impurities: the colours cancel each other out in the mixing, leaving only an impression of dirtiness.

Ernest Chaplet, ceramicist, maker of the moneyboxes and jugs which we also see in this display, is another of Gauguin's encounters – they worked together on the creation of several pieces. These date from before their meeting but the Japonist floral motif is notable...



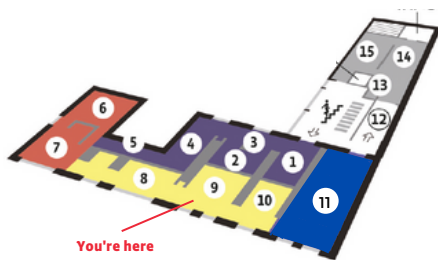
These date from before their meeting but the Japonist floral motif is notable... Oh, yes, Japonism!

Another of the facets of Synthetism we have still to tackle. Japanese art was very fashionable in Europe at the end of the 19th century, and its codes, based on purity of line and flat colours are reminiscent of some of the Synthetist theories ...

But before we head off to the Land of the Rising Sun, we have to explore another aspect of those who made up the School of Pont-Aven – the spiritual quest.

3rd floor - Room 9

The spiritual quest



Gauguin said, *"Think more about the creation than the result. It's the only way to rise towards God in doing as our divine Master, creating."* He probably had in him the idea of painting as an act bringing us nearer to God...

The religious theme is very clear among the Pont-Aven painters, as can be seen in this selection of paintings and lithographs. Gauguin himself did not hesitate to depict Christ in some of his canvases... Maurice Denis, who was a member of the Dominican Third Order, bought Gauguin's *The Self Portrait of the Yellow Christ* in 1903... But with Denis, the vision of holiness is more firmly anchored in the everyday as in *Pilgrims of Emmaüs*, a colour lithograph from 1895. On the other hand, for Émile Bernard, classical religious iconography is a thematic base, we have *Virgins and child*, *Nativities*... Paul Sérusier, for his part, explored the *Mysteries*, researching, *The Golden Mean*, and mathematical formulae dictating the proportions to be used in religious works.

There is a certain refined symmetry at work in his *Virgin and Child* displayed here...



It would seem then fair to speak of a mystic disposition shared by the Pont-Aven painters; a disposition which forms part of a wider wave of mysticism which swept the world in the late 19th century. It's understandable how Brittany was then a powerful centre of attraction with its wayside crosses, chapels and megalithic monuments which point to more ancient beliefs

3rd floor - Room 9



Mysticism, symbolism or syncretism?

Several elements seem to be mixed in Breton religiosity, but the same could be said about the spirituality of these painters...

The mysticism expressed in their works depends on a syncretic approach, that is one which mixes several influences, not all Christian in origin. The approach is also symbolist, as the work is designed to appeal to the viewer's spirit in the first place, rather than the eye. Symbolism is first seen in literature, in particular in Charles Baudelaire, and represents a philosophical basis on which Cloisonnism, then Synthetism, are founded. In 1886, in the Symbolist manifesto, the critic Jean Moréas defines this as the attribution of a shape to an idea, in other words – making the invisible visible. It could be said that Synthetism is the form symbolism took in Pont-Aven.

But maybe there are too many "isms" around and it may be time to plunge into the founding principles defining the Pont-Aven School, since up to now we've tackled them one piece at a time...

In the next space a film narrates the dialogue between Émile Bernard and Paul Gauguin and retraces the birth of Synthetism through its founding works.

After the film, continue on the route.

3rd floor - Room 11

Techniques and theories of the Pont-Aven School



As we have seen, Paul Gauguin, when he arrived at Pont-Aven, was breaking away from Impressionism, which, despite its modernity, seemed to him to be too firmly fixed in tradition. Painting the real world seemed to him no longer to be a route for an artist to follow, art had to be an abstraction... In 1888, a revolution took place when he invented, along with Émile Bernard, the style known as Synthetism. He would never deny admiring the work of Pissaro, Degas, Cézanne ... Synthetism formed part of the Symbolist movement; significantly the Synthetists advocated painting from memory to distance oneself as far as possible from painting from life. You soak up a landscape then recreate it inside the studio, far from the subject; thus the idea, the feeling are recreated rather than the real.

To define Synthetism technically, it can be said to aim for simplification in the first instance, simplification of shape, of the use of colour, which is pure, flat, in total opposition to the little touches of colour of Impressionism. Colour need not be realistic: it expresses a subjective, emotional vision.

Maurice Denis remarked, *"Remember that a painting before it is a warhorse, a naked woman or any old anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered in colours put together in a certain order."* And then there are the outlines, derived from the Cloisonnism of Anquetin and Bernard, to underline the flatness of the colour. Framing is daring, with figures and details being cropped; the separation between foreground and background can be very distinct, in levels. This brings a new perspective, even an absence of perspective, a flattening, with flat drawing in two dimensions.

The "synthesis" thus created is a synthesis of simplified natural shapes with the feelings of the artist towards his subject. The overall vision is restricted to a few spaces, a few colours.



3rd floor - Room 11



Significant Works of the Pont-Aven School

Here works by the iconic artists working in the style initiated by Paul Gauguin and Émile Bernard are exhibited.

The Creek by Maxime Maufra, by condensing effects and eliminating detail, expresses a strong emotion in a Synthetist style.



The sea is worked with a thick paste, the cliffs remain white, the colour of the bare canvas. Simplification is writ large in Charles Filiger's painting, **Rocky Landscape, le Pouldu**: the planes are stacked up in a verticality structured by the colour, a composition which inspired the garden of this museum. In **Landscape With a Blue Tree** by Meijer de Haan, we can clearly see the flat colours without perspective, the subjects outlined with a blue brush and extremely simplified.

In Maxime Maufra, Meijer de Haan, Wladyslaw Slewinski, Charles Filiger and Émile Jourdan the Pont-Aven group is represented here in its full richness and diversity.

3rd floor - Room 11

The Break-up of the Group

When Gauguin finally left for Tahiti on 28 June 1895, the majority of the painters who had associated themselves with him were at a turning-point in their careers. Some dispersed across the Breton peninsula and joined up with the artistic colonies at Concarneau, Douarnenez, Camaret and Cancale. Émile Bernard had already left for Cairo, whence he would return with a touch of classicism and looking to pit himself against the Renaissance masters. He never ceased claiming Synthetism as his own, which from 1891 on had set him at odds with Gauguin. Gauguin broke with almost all his relationships in Brittany: Pont-Aven for him had only been a stopover on his way to achieve his objectives and he wanted to mark himself off from the others as he renewed his inspiration in the islands of the Pacific, even if Brittany broke through in some of his South Sea Island paintings. Among the fifteen or so painters who could be considered to belong to the School of Pont-Aven only four lived here for any time beyond Gauguin's departure: Emile Jourdan, Charles Filiger, Roderic O'Connor et Wladyslaw Slewinski.

The landscape artists in the group, such as Moret and Maufra, continued to work around Pont-Aven and Brittany, but their style became less daring, more Impressionist. It has to be remembered that they were chaperoned by the dealer, Durand Ruel, who busied himself selling their pieces and whose recommendations were unequivocal, *"Try to push the work on as far as possible with nature before your eyes, for it is difficult to find all the fine and varied tones in the studio which we can observe in the countryside."* A far cry from the memory work advocated by Gauguin.

A number of the artists of the Pont-Aven colony returned to their countries of origin. Cuno Amiet went back to Switzerland in 1893; his Breton canvases, exhibited in Basel in 1894 aroused incomprehension, with critics writing, *"Incredible chromatic capers, the mad hallucinations of one colour-blind."*



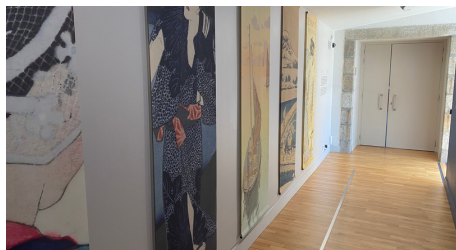
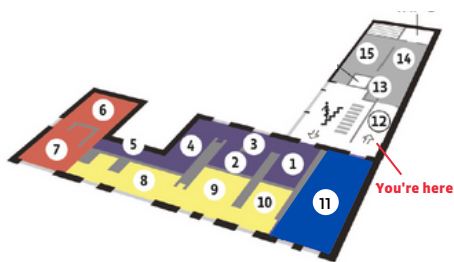
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Japan and Europe

In the 19th century, Japonism was a fashion, a fad even, sweeping across Europe. It all started in 1853 when the American fleet entered the bay of Edo, until then closed to foreign ships. The Americans forced Japan into trade deals, an example swiftly followed by the great European nations. Japanese arts and crafts subsequently flowed to the United States and the old continent and supplied the Universal Exhibitions, like that in Paris in 1867.

On that occasion the **ukiyo-e** (images of the floating world) prints were displayed. Produced by an art movement developed between 1603 and 1868, they were considered vulgar in Japan because of their popular themes, but the genre was hugely successful with Westerners. Painters and engravers found new ideas in terms of colour, drawing technique, layout, perspective and format which caused radical upheavals in terms of graphic composition. The shockwave spread unabated through Impressionism to Art Nouveau and even Art Deco.

The term "Japonism" was coined by the art critic Philippe Burty and, at the start of the 1880s, Paris was the main focus of the Japonist movement.



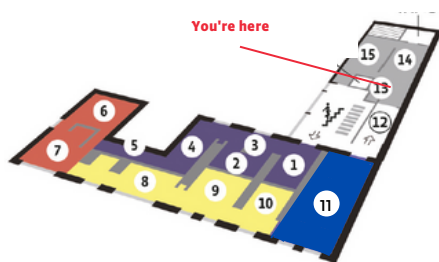
Two dealers, Tadamasa Hayashi and Siegfried Bing, living in Paris after the 1878 Universal Exhibition, played a key role in the distribution of these ukiyo-e prints which were taken from wood engravings.

Japonism is a kind of forerunner of primitivism which took in, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Art of Sub-Saharan Africa and the South Sea Islands. It is worth noting that none other than Gauguin found himself precisely at the junction of these currents...

In the eyes of the Impressionist generation, Japanese art displays an almost animistic proximity to nature and shows, in the attention devoted to the aesthetics of the humblest objects, of a possible symbiosis between art and society.

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Pont-Aven and Japonism



Japanese art found, in the innovative art movements of the West in the second half of the 19th century, fertile and favourable ground for its circulation. More than a source of inspiration, it confirmed their visual mind-sets and was a real catalyst for experimentation which had already taken root. Monet, Moreau, Degas and, later, Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec had an avid interest in Utamaro, Hokusai and Hiroshige and created pieces influenced by the principles of composition of the ukiyo-e prints.

At Pont-Aven, the parallel with Synthetism is clear – this new flexible way of expressing oneself in art was linked to these prints. In his notes published in 1903, Émile Bernard picks out Japan as the first source of his interest in synthesis: *“The study of Japanese seersucker led us towards simplicity, we created Cloisonnism.”*

Thus the artists of the little Pont-Aven community appreciated these compositions distinguished by the lack of perspective, negation of depth, space as stacked planes ; they recognised themselves in these unusual eccentric ways of framing which cropped shapes, in the simplification, the abundant use of elegant curving lines, in the decorative nature of the stylised floral and vegetable motifs and in the absence of shading and shadow which had been replaced by the bold juxtaposition of flat colours.

It can be felt, for example, in the work of André Jolly, who regularly visited this Breton village from 1903 and was initiated to Gauguin's theories by Henry Moret. In **The Seaweed Gatherers**, an oil from 1910, some of the seven preparatory works for which are exhibited here, the stylisation of the subjects is noteworthy, as is the treatment of the sea which recalls the foam of the prints of Hokusai.



André Jolly, the Seaweed Gatherers, 1910.

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Origin of the Nabis

At the end of 1888, some young painters from the Académie Julian led by Paul Sérusier – who had just come back from Pont-Aven – founded the movement, Les Nabis. The term had been suggested to Maurice Denis by Auguste Cazalis. It was a Francification of “nebiim”, meaning in Hebrew and Arabic, “prophet”.

According to Maurice Denis, the Nabis called themselves this because *“the state of enthusiasm had to come naturally to them”*. They met in Paul Ranson’s studio. They wanted to break with the naturalist vision of the Impressionists and declared themselves determinedly Symbolist. They made Gauguin’s ideas on synthesis their own and consider The Talisman as the emblem of a new aesthetics. The group was made up of Paul Sérusier, Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, Georges Lacombe and some foreign painters, among them the Swiss artist, Félix Vallotton. As the intellectuals of the group, Sérusier and Denis formed theories about artistic experimentation and published manifestos; influenced by Christianity or Theosophy, a doctrine based on the ubiquity of divine wisdom, in particular in man, they composed esoteric and mystical works. Their approach kick-started a renewal of religious art at the end of the 19th century.

Other members of the group – such as Bonnard and Vuillard – suggested an artistic approach closer to the Impressionists and Fauves.

Les Nabis organised thirteen exhibitions between 1891 and 1896. From a stylistic point of view, they are close to the Pont-Aven School where some had had occasion to go. Thus, they advocated two-dimensional work, without the need to worry about shading or perspective which spoils the expression of the basic emotion and feeling.

They fully support the use of vivid solid colour blocks, curving lines, simple shapes. Painting had to be an interpretation of nature by choice and by synthesis and must always suggest that dreams and spirituality are constantly present in life. Les Nabis all professed a great admiration for Gauguin.

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Significant Works in the Nabis Gallery

Although Cuno Amiet, two of whose etchings are exhibited here, didn't meet the Nabi group during his time studying at the Académie Julian, he did spend thirteen months staying at the Pension Gloanec which he described with passion, *"Painters arrived: Chamailard ..., Émile Bernard ..., then Seguin, Moret and Sérusier. Discussions and debates about theory were in full swing ... I met O'Connor, an intelligent Irishman, full of life, who paints using bright unbroken colours. Armand Seguin, pleasant and witty, open to anything. Émile Bernard who had finished a piece and spoke animatedly about Gauguin, Van Gogh and Cézanne. Daumier's lithographic work was there in its totality ... This environment was in full flow, permanently fighting each other, but above all, and this is the essential point, everyone devoted themselves fervently to painting."*

The Maternity by Pouldu, Evening Effect, by Maurice Denis was painted in 1899 from the Hotel of Pouldu-Clément Portier.

Its composition is based on simple shapes but he does not confine himself to colour blocks like at Pont-Aven; the perspective on the other hand is flattened and translated by the layering of the landscape through the window. This was Maurice Denis's first visit to South Cornouaille, on a family holiday... He came back in 1905, after the death of Gauguin and undertook a pilgrimage along with Sérusier to the places Gauguin, de Haan and so many others held dear.



Georges Lacombe, known as the Nabi sculptor, and who went on to create busts of Paul Sérusier and Maurice Denis, favoured the forest as a recurrent subject in his paintings. It often has a mysterious dimension. In Breton **Man Carrying a Child**, a canvas from 1894, the truncated trees stand out, creating an unusual background for the central figure and seeming to suggest a strange intrusion into the real. **The Grotto at Camaret**, from 1890 – 97, shows the influence of Japanese prints. He also produced numerous seascapes, often very much influenced by Japonism, to the point where an acerbic critic remarked, *"Mr. Lacombe's fantasies surpass the permitted limits of chinoiserie."* Here you can see that Lacombe preferred the line, the bold and trenchant cut of Japanese art as opposed to the shimmer of the Impressionist brushstrokes. He was a close friend of Paul Ranson, whose lithographs exhibited here share the Japanese- inspired sinuosity of line in their composition.

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The techniques of engraving

Engraving as it is practiced today is presented in a series of six short films for you, each illustrating a creative technique used within this space.

The Japanese engraving technique is called xylography, that is, engraving on wood, or woodcut. Generally, hardwoods are used, such as cherry or catalpa, cut and engraved with the grain. As with all processes, woodcut has an effect on the style. Wood engraving favours contours and colour blocks, synthetic shapes and flexibility of line. Colours play a key role; they create the rhythm, demark spaces, and emphasise volumes. The artist creates the drawing; it is then entrusted to an engraver who creates the matrix in relief. A polychrome print might require up to ten different wooden plates, one for each colour: each plate has on it only the colour blocks of a single colour. The printer then proceeds to press: he first of all prints the plate which outlines the shapes. Then he positions this proof on the plates of various colours, inked with a short-bristle brush. The inks are chosen with the artist.

In the case of lithography, the matrix is in stone, often very finely grained limestone. The drawing can be made directly onto the stone in pencil or using lithographic ink. Tracing is an alternative process. The stone is then dampened for printing – it is porous so it retains water. Then ink is placed on the whole surface. The ink remains where there is stickiness from the drawing medium and the damp dispels it from all other areas; thus after the impression, only the drawing appears on the sheet. As many plates as colours are required.

Metal plates soon became an alternative to stone which was difficult to handle. Etching or aquatint is an engraving process on metal plates which uses acid. The plate is covered in engraver's varnish, onto which the artist draws his subject, using a point, or fine cold chisel. Then the plate is plunged into an acid bath which eats away the uncovered parts and reveals a relief of the drawing. Copper or zinc are often used, leading to the term zincography.



André Jolly, Bonne année 1915. Quimper. Dépôt des convalescents, 1915

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Jean Deyrolle

The career of Jean Deyrolle, grandson of the realist painter, Théophile Deyrolle, led him from conventional figurative painting to pure abstraction, spurred on by an internal need marked by spirituality. Born in Nogent-sur-Marne in 1911 to a family of Breton origin, he grew up in Concarneau then went to the School of Art and Advertising in Paris in 1929. Once he had his degree, he quit advertising and headed back to Concarneau. He started painting and criss- crossed Brittany painting still lifes and landscapes.

After a trip to Morocco he returned to France in 1938 and again took up residence in Concarneau where he had his grandfather's studio at his disposal. He discovered Paul Sérusier's work and thereafter often visited his widow, Marguerite in Châteauneuf-du-Faou to study his paintings and writing. In 1944 the artist committed himself to abstraction: he struck up a friendship with Alberto Magnelli, who had a great spiritual influence on him and met the Parisian dealer Jeanne Bucher who bought his first non-figurative pieces. In 1945 he took part in the Salon of Surindépendants and the following year was part of a group of abstract artists which formed around the Denise René Gallery, which also included Gilioli, Poliakoff and Vasarely.



In the 1950s his style became freer still, his strength confirmed in the delicacy of the pictorial media, the elegance of the shades, easing of formal rigour via the interplay of line and modulation. Numerous solo exhibitions were later dedicated to him in France and abroad.

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The Works of Jean Deyrolle

Self-Portrait With a Fig-Tree, of 1941 and **The Cleaner of Barley** of 1942 are key canvases for Jean Deyrolle, between the figurative and the abstract. The influence of Paul Sérusier is very clear in these pieces, at a time when Deyrolle was visiting the house at Châteauneuf-du-Faou assiduously.

He adopts a good number of Sérusier's theories – composition based on *The Golden Number*, the use of tempera, the rules of harmony of colours with the principle of grey colours and of two distinct palettes, one for warm colours, the other for cold tones, thus avoiding mixing pigments.

Although Sérusier's stylistic and formal influence would only really last about 18 months, the iconic figure of the Nabis would leave a lasting mark on the work of Deyrolle. Two pieces from the 60s are examples here of his road to pure abstraction: **Hernet, opus 637**, belongs to his third abstract period which stretched from 1954 to 1965 during which he expressed himself with growing freedom – its elements are dislocated, laminated in structure like specular minerals, like schist spoil. You can see the logic, the rhythm of a pictorial abstraction which owe nothing to figurative rhythms.

In **Ovid, opus 850** from 1966, new tensions provoke thrusts in all directions, a kernel seems to explode to open up a canopy. The coloured transparent layers are spaced out in light gradations and suggest imperceptible movements animating the different planes. A diffuse light emanates from the work – it seems to come from the depths of the materials

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Conclusion

The Pont-Aven of Gauguin and the artists who followed him has a real and an imaginary dimension. He prepared the ground for an assault on a landscape and culture unknown to these artists from elsewhere, but above all he represented the means to transcend this reality, to express what was deepest within themselves. Thus he made of them creators of modern painting, a role continued by Jean Deyrolle. Didn't Gauguin say to them, *"Brothers do not imitate. Start with yourselves. Go into yourself until the cry of the new-born is heard."*

The reach of the School of Pont-Aven is written in the creations which have succeeded it. Whether it's the Fauves, the Impressionists or the Abstracts of the 20th century, the artists of these different movements have well understood the fundamental dimension brought to the table by Paul Gauguin and his circle of friends – that is to represent a lived experience beyond the visible and to move away from the subject to better reach the idea and the emotion.

It is now time for us to say goodbye and I would invite you to travel through Pont-Aven and its surroundings absorbing the lights, colours and shapes which gave birth to the works you have been able to enjoy here today. Until we meet again, and kindly leave your device with the receptionist on the ground floor.