

= Self @-@ Portrait with Halo and Snake =

Self @-@ Portrait with Halo and Snake , also known as Self @-@ Portrait , is an 1889 oil on wood painting by French artist Paul Gauguin , which represents his late Brittany period in the fishing village of Le Pouldu in northwestern France . No longer comfortable with Pont @-@ Aven , Gauguin moved on to Le Pouldu with his friend and student Meijer de Haan and a small group of artists . He stayed for several months in the autumn of 1889 and the summer of 1890 , where the group spent their time decorating the interior of Marie Henry 's inn with every major type of art work . Gauguin painted his Self @-@ Portrait in the dining room with its companion piece , Portrait of Jacob Meyer de Haan (1889) .

The painting shows Gauguin against a red background with a halo above his head and apples hanging beside him as he holds a snake in his hand while plants or flowers appear in the foreground . The religious symbolism and the stylistic influence of Japanese wood @-@ block prints and cloisonnism are apparent . The portrait was completed several years before Gauguin visited Tahiti and is one of more than 40 self @-@ portraits he completed during his lifetime . The work reached the art market in 1919 when Marie Henry sold it at the Galerie Barbazanges in Paris as part of her collected works from the Le Pouldu period . American banker Chester Dale acquired the painting in 1928 , gifting it upon his death in 1962 to the National Gallery of Art in Washington , D.C.

= = Background = =

Paul Gauguin (1848 ? 1903) was a French Post @-@ Impressionist artist and figure in the Symbolist movement known for his contributions to the Synthetist style . In 1886 , he spent the summer in Pont @-@ Aven in Brittany , an artists colony that became known as the Pont @-@ Aven School for Gauguin 's influence and the work they produced . In late 1888 , Gauguin painted for nine weeks with Vincent van Gogh at his Yellow House in Arles in the south of France before van Gogh had a breakdown , leading him to cut off his ear and be hospitalized . Gauguin left Arles and never saw van Gogh again , but they continued to exchange letters and ideas .

He briefly returned to Paris where he lived with painter Émile Schuffenecker , but returned to Pont @-@ Aven in the spring of 1889 only to find it too crowded . Gauguin moved farther away " to escape the tourists and the Parisian and foreign painters " and arrived at Le Pouldu on October 2 , 1889 . He found lodgings with Meijer de Haan at Buvette de la Plage , an inn run by Marie Henry . De Haan introduced Gauguin to Thomas Carlyle 's novel Sartor Resartus (1836) by way of conversation . Although he would not read the novel for several more years , Gauguin became acquainted with Carlyle 's ideas which would influence his approach to art during this time .

The interior of Marie Henry 's inn became their canvas , and they painted their work on the walls , ceilings , and windows . They were later joined by artists Paul Sérusier and Charles Filiger . According to Nora M. Heimann , when the room was completed , it " encompassed paintings of every major type ? genre , landscape , self @-@ portraiture , portraiture , still life , and even history painting ? in media ranging from tempera and oil on plaster to oil on canvas and panel ; as well as prints and drawings ; painted and glazed ceramic vessels ; exotic found objects ; and carved , polychromed figures in wood . "

Gauguin tried to win the affection of Marie Henry , the inkeeper , but she spurned his advances and became intimate with de Haan instead , leaving Gauguin jealous . Gauguin departed on November 7 , 1890 , leaving his work at Marie Henry 's inn . She retired in 1893 and moved to Kerfany , taking many of the art works with her . She continued to lease the inn until 1911 when she sold it . When the new owner was redecorating the inn in 1924 , which by then had been converted into a restaurant , the rest of the murals were discovered buried intact under wallpaper .

= = Development = =

Van Gogh had previously decorated rooms with his paintings , in particular the rooms of several restaurants in Paris and the Yellow House in Arles . Gauguin and de Haan appear to have been

influenced by this work , as they began decorating the dining room of Buvette de la Plage in a similar fashion . Gauguin 's Self @-@ Portrait was prepared along with its pendant , Portrait of Jacob Meyer de Haan (1889) , to the right and left respectively of a fireplace on the upper panels of two wooden cupboard doors . Gauguin gave the panels a subtle , textured matte surface using white chalk ground and a combed wave pattern . Both works were completed sometime between mid @-@ November and mid @-@ December 1889 .

= = Description = =

French art historian Françoise Cachin notes that Gauguin designed both Self @-@ Portrait with Halo and Snake and its companion piece Portrait of Jacob Meyer de Haan as a caricature . In his Self @-@ Portrat , Gauguin appears against a red background with a halo above his head and apples hanging beside him as he holds a snake in his hand with what appear to be either plants or flowers in the foreground . Curator Philip Conisbee observes the religious symbolism in the images , noting that the " apples and snake refer to the Garden of Eden , temptation , sin , and the Fall of Man . " Gauguin divides the canvas in half , painting himself as both saint and sinner , reflecting his own personal myth as an artist . In the top portion of the painting , Gauguin is almost angelic with the halo , looking away from the apples of temptation . In the bottom portion , he holds the snake , completing the duality .

Jirat @-@ Wasiuty?ski notes that art historian Denys Sutton was the first critic to interpret Gauguin 's self @-@ portrait as " demonic " . This interpretation is illustrated by the pendant , the companion piece Portrait of Jacob Meyer de Haan (1889) , which visually complements the Self @-@ Portrait . De Haan 's devilish eyes and red hair shaped like horns in his portrait on the left side of the dining room where it was created in situ , corresponds to the snake held in Gauguin 's hand in his self @-@ portrait on the right door of the dining room . Two books appear on the table in de Haan 's portrait : Paradise Lost (1667 ? 74) by seventeenth @-@ century English poet John Milton , and Sartor Resartus by Thomas Carlyle . These respective literary allusions , to Milton 's Satan and to Carlyle 's Diogenes Teufelsdröckh , a character described as both angelic and diabolical , play directly into de Haan 's and Gauguin 's corresponding self @-@ portraits . Jirat @-@ Wasiuty?ski argues that Gauguin portrays himself as a magus , as " both seer and demonic angel " .

The work shows the influence of Japanese wood @-@ block prints and cloisonnism . In the painting , Gauguin wears what art historian Henri Dorra compares to the saffron colored robe of a Buddhist monk , perhaps influenced by Van Gogh 's earlier Self @-@ Portrait Dedicated to Paul Gauguin (1888) . In a letter to Gauguin dated October 3 , 1888 , Van Gogh describes himself in the self @-@ portrait as " a character of a bonze , a simple worshiper of the eternal Buddha " . Compared to Gauguin 's more traditional Self @-@ Portrait Dedicated to Carrière (1888 or 1889) , the self @-@ portrait painted at Le Pouldu is more " sinister " .

= = Provenance = =

In 1919 , Marie Henry sold Gauguin 's Self @-@ Portrait as part of a batch of 14 other works to François Norgelet for a total of 35 @,@ 000 francs , where it was exhibited at the Galerie Barbazanges in Paris . Although ownership details are scant , the painting is thought to have passed through the hands of several owners , including London art collector Mrs. R. A. Workman and later Lord Ivor Spencer @-@ Churchill . It was sold by Churchill to the galleries Alex Reid and Lefèvre in 1923 , who then sold it to Kraushaar Galleries in 1925 . American banker Chester Dale acquired the work in 1928 . The painting was later bequeathed by Dale to the National Gallery of Art in 1962 after his death . The Chester Dale Collection opened at the National Gallery in 1965 .