

# GAUGUIN

## Alive and Well Remembered in Tahiti



### A visit to the Musée Gauguin

By Jack Goldfarb

When Eugene Henri Paul Gauguin landed in Tahiti in June 1891, two days after his 43rd birthday, he had come seeking a primitive environment, a serene lifestyle, and glorious landscapes to inspire his questing artistic soul.

Leaving behind in Europe his wife, five children, and 30 of his paintings auctioned off in Paris to finance his journey, ex-stockbroker Gauguin soon grew restless with the sleepy capital of Papeete and its tiresome social circle of French colonial officials, merchants, and their wives.

He withdrew to rural Mataiea on Tahiti's south coast where he rented a bamboo hut, invited Teha'amana, a pretty 13-year-old Tahitianne, to share it with him, and settled down to paint.

Today, 75 years after his death, Paul Gauguin, who profoundly influenced modern art, lives on in Tahiti through constant reminders of his life and work. Along Papeete's harborside Boulevard Pomare, handsome Gauguinesque women clad in colorful *pareus*, wearing frangipani and

hibiscus garlands in their hair, languidly tend their native jewelry stalls. In Papeete's Municipal Market, overflowing with tropical fruit, vegetables, fish, and fowl, the gregarious Tahitians still gather from all over the island to shop and gossip as they did when Gauguin bought his own provisions there. And in the lush countryside, the brilliant colors of Gauguin's palette — the purples, oranges, and yellows — still dazzle the eye.

But mostly, Gauguin is alive and well remembered in the impressive museum bearing his name. Overlooking a quiet lagoon in Papeari, and fringed by towering coconut palms, not far from where the artist's bamboo hut once stood, the site of the Musée Gauguin is considered one of the most beautiful settings in Polynesia.

Such is the mystique and romantic legendry surrounding Tahiti's most celebrated personality, that over half of the island's 100,000 annual tourists (more people than in the local population) make the 30-mile trek out of Papeete to visit the museum.

The Musée Gauguin houses art work and thousands of items of memorabilia connected with the artist's life, but, surprisingly enough, only two of his original paintings. While other originals have previously been