

exhibited here, Gilles Artur, Museum Director, anticipates that more will now become available as air conditioning has recently been installed. Owners of Gauguin's works had been reluctant to loan paintings because of fears of deterioration in the tropical climate.

A diversity of individuals contributed to the establishment of the museum a decade ago. The most prominent were a French priest with the unlikely name of Patrick O'Reilly, a sewing machine heiress who became a princess, and a scion of an American plumbing fixtures' manufacturing family.

Père O'Reilly, a French missionary and eminent Pacific scholar, was the prime mover who stubbornly persisted with his idea of a Gauguin museum in Tahiti. The spry septuagenarian's efforts in gathering Gauguiniana from all over the world were invaluable. Financial support for the project came from the Paris-based Singer-Polignac Foundation, created by Princess Edmond de Polignac, the former Winnareta Singer, patron of the arts and daughter of Isaac M. Singer, who mass-produced the domestic sewing machine. Cornelius Crane, widely-traveled member of a New York plumbing supplies family, on a visit to Tahiti, spontaneously donated the museum site, once a part of the adjacent American-cultivated Botanical Gardens.

The museum consists of four Polynesian-styled buildings arranged in a rectangle, and linked by covered walkways. The walkways form a giant picture frame enclosing a green lawn as a canvas. From the roof of the rear building a dominant pyramid soars skyward, giving the effect of a futuristic native hut, to symbolize Gauguin's modernist approach to his primitive motifs.

In the museum's flagstoned garden, three rock-carved *tikis*, including a one-ton castrated male figure, glower angrily. A local belief has it that it is tabu to move one of these idols. It wasn't easy to find laborers to haul these ancient *tikis*, originally from an

outlying island, down to Papeari. When the three workmen who eventually did the job succumbed soon afterwards to fatal accidents, virtually no one would believe it was a coincidence.

Moving clockwise through the four gracefully-designed buildings, Gauguin's life unfolds in graphic detail. The freely-flowing lines of the wooden roof beams, the stone floor patterns, and white walls all enhance the displays, divided into four themes:

- * Gauguin's childhood, travels in the merchant marine, and stay at an artist's colony in Brittany,
- * His years in Tahiti and on Hiva Oa, the neighboring island where he died,
- * Gauguin as writer, engraver, sculptor, and crusader of causes, and
- * His death and legacy.

At the museum's main entrance a startling photographic blow-up of Gauguin's self-portrait, *Les Misérables*, greets the viewer. Dedicated to fellow-artist, Vincent van Gogh, with whom he exchanged self-portraits, the painting was criticized by Van Gogh as having the face of a "prisoner" with "not a trace of cheerfulness." Gauguin himself described it as the face of a "bandit" and "a discredited impressionist painter," but he considered it as one of his finest works.

Scores of the 640 paintings of his lifetime are displayed throughout the museum, but, except for the two precious originals, the rest are copies, mainly the work of French artists, Yves de Saint Front and Jean Pierre Zingg. Reproductions of the more renowned Gauguin canvases are all here, including *Tahitian Women with Mangoes*, a masterpiece of sensuality and grandeur; *la Orana Maria* (Hail to Thee, Mary!), once rejected by the Louvre as too sacrilegious; *Arearea* (Amusements), dancers, flute players, and a huge red dog; *Nava Nava Mahana* (Delightful Day), Tahitians picnicking among the trees; *Te Matete* (The Market), a row of seated women resembling a classic Egyptian frieze; and the immense *Where Do We Come*

From? Who Are We? Where Are We Going?, which summed up Gauguin's spiritual anguish and was completed just prior to his unsuccessful suicide attempt.

Of the two originals, *The Dream* and *Children in the Street*, only *The Dream* was painted in Tahiti. In *Children in the Street*, an earlier work, Gauguin's wife, Mette, and two of his children can be seen in the picture. Malcolm Forbes, American publisher who loaned the painting, pointed out jokingly that only this way did Gauguin's family ever get to Tahiti.

The museum's most intriguing display is the artist's 130-page Notebook (facsimiled) kept during his first years in Tahiti. Besides recording in it a Tahitian vocabulary and useful addresses, Gauguin used it as a sketchbook. Depicted in it are over 350 drawings of Tahitian figures, body postures, animals, landscapes, and dozens of watercolored images which reappeared in his finished works.

The other facets of Gauguin's creative genius are amply visible: manuscripts of his books — the autobiographical *Intimate Journals* and his profusely illustrated writings on South Seas life, *Noa Noa* and *Ancien Culte Mahorie*; copies of *Le Sourire*, a publication he founded to satirize the colonial authorities with whom he often wrangled; woodcuts, engravings, and sculpted wooden panels from his Hiva Oa house, one of which advises, "*Soyez amoureuses et vous serez heureuses*" ("Be lovers and you will be happy").

Whether Gauguin's talents extended to the art of cookery is unclear, but a set of eleven menus prepared for a dinner party he gave is colorfully decorated with Tahitian and Breton designs, and lists the culinary delights he served.

Some of the other more fascinating objects in the museum include a meticulous re-creation, down to the tiniest Polynesian artifact, of his last studio on Hiva Oa; photographs of the construction of the Panama Canal, on which he worked for a time as a digger; and a receipt showing the items