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Prints and Photographs On View at Metropolitan

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Prejudices that have raised painting and sculpture to a high stature in the arts and relegated prints and photography to a lower level have often been the cause of great esthetic injustices and have frequently been sad deterrents to the discovery of fine works of art in the so-called "secondary media."

Three exhibitions opened yesterday in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Prints and Drawings Galleries — Prints by Paul Gauguin, *Paradise Lost Illustrated* and Photographs by Stephen Shore — and at least two are worthy declarations that works in these media can hold their own against the quality paintings and sculptures installed in the Metropolitan's adjoining rooms.

The Gauguin exhibition, from the Met's own collections, stands out as yet another reminder of how rich and unfathomed the museum treasure is and as an eloquent example of how the woodcut and the lithograph were by nature at one — at times more than painting — with the forceful immediacy of spirit and stark simplicity of form in Gauguin's art.

There is, on display, a rare first edition of a series of lithographs printed on unusual yellow paper. Mementos of Gauguin's sojourn at Pont-Aven, Martinique and Arles, they are strong in their bold black contrasts of elemental figures moving against an assertive yellow background and offer, as such, remarkable instances of Gauguin's versatility in this medium.

But the woodcut lent itself much more forcefully to the qualities inherent in Gauguin's art. It also afforded him the chance to experiment with various colored ink combinations that could produce, in repetitions of the same cut, a great range of mood and expression. The first artist of a particular eminence since the 16th century to use the woodcut as an art form, Gauguin turned to it as a source of printmaking to illustrate

"Noa Noa," his South Seas journal, and later a small newspaper he founded, *Le Sourire*. Examples from each highlight the show.

The other print exhibition, *Paradise Lost Illustrated*, a miscellany of isolated prints and prints in books, serves more as a limited display of information on various illustrations of the 17th-century John Milton poem than an esthetic experience of grand scale.

Most of the show is devoted to the prints of the 19th-century English artist John Martin. Highly acclaimed in his day, Martin has been somewhat forgotten. It is understandable. His prints, which found constrained inspiration in theatrical bursts of light, vast spaces, grandiose and disproportionate scale and in classical archeology, rank as only illustration to art but certainly not art in illustration. In fact, the illustrations of *Paradise Lost* by Fuseli and Blake, some of which are on view, either in the original or in reproduction, make the vision of Martin look regrettably myopic.

The photographs of Stephen Shore give rise to general philosophical concepts such as time and space, permanence and impermanence, relativism and absolutism more readily than they give rise to particular thoughts of certain people, specific events or identifiable places.

In this extraordinary and beautiful exhibition of photographs taken with the last two years, Mr. Shore introduces us to a site through a series of photographs taken at various places in the location. By means of a constant, a tree, a cloud or even a recurring format, he forces the viewer to take time to walk around and discover the landscape, piecing together in his own mind's eye what goes on in between pictures. Whether Mr. Shore focuses in on a sidewalk on Avenue of the Americas, a car dump in the woods, a house in the country or a ranch in the South-



Lithograph in show of Gauguin's works at Metropolitan

west, he seems to be demonstrating a valuable principle of life.

Mr. Shore has considerable respect for the process of making the picture and freely

allows observations of his technique and compositional arrangements. Such integrity toward the act of creation heightens, in this case, the creation itself.