



PAUL GAUGUIN
THE PRINTS



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Tobia Bezzola
Elizabeth Prelinger

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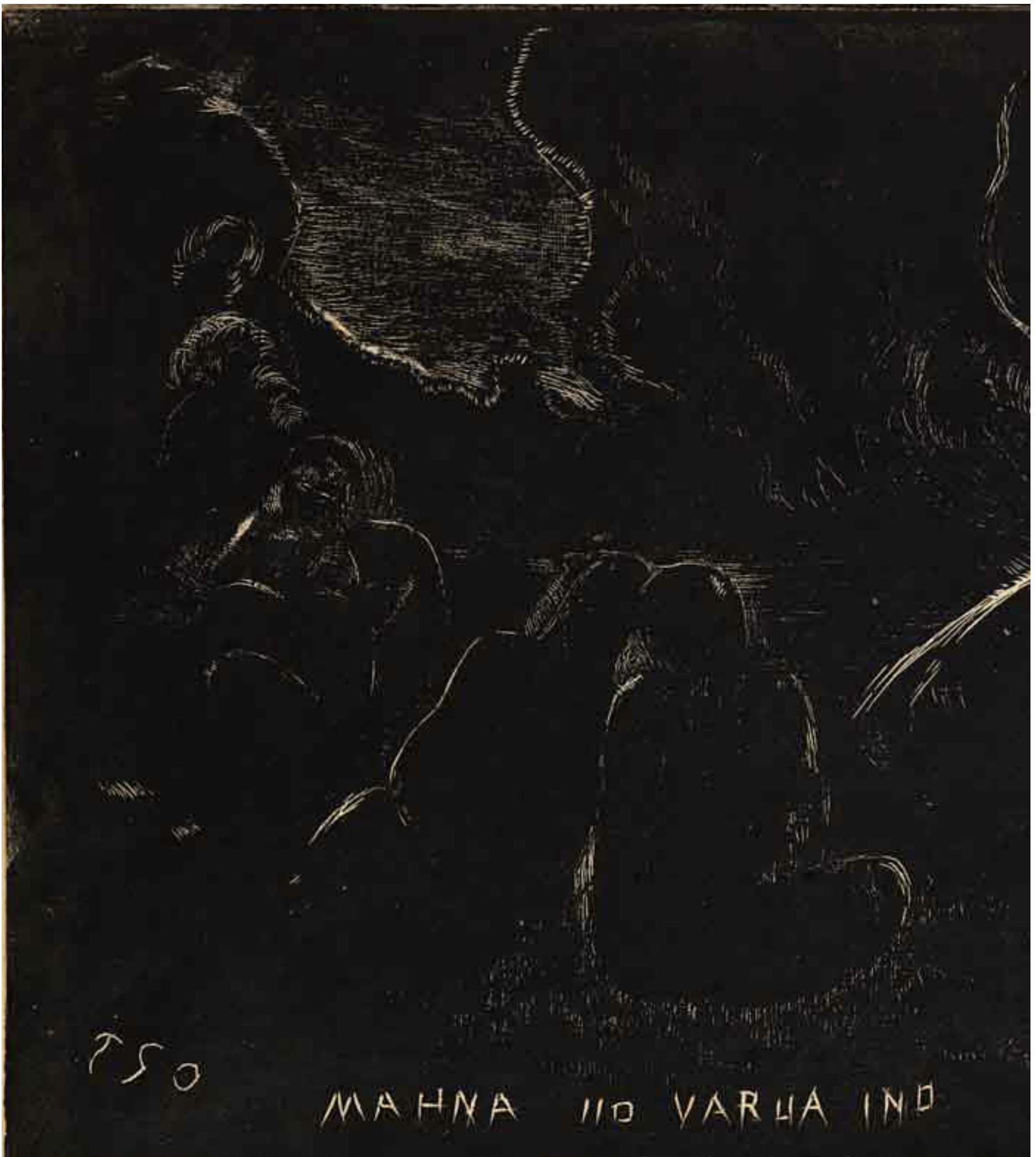
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MAHNA IIO VARUA INO







Foreword and Thanks

Christoph Becker

The prints and drawings made by Paul Gauguin (b. June 7, 1848, in Paris; d. May 8, 1903, in Atuona on Hiva Oa, the Marquesas Islands) in the 1880s and 1890s were groundbreaking works of art. Gauguin is to be placed, as a painter, at modernism's outset; and he became one of the most renowned artists of the era. His works on paper are a crucial element of his art and, more than this, it is impossible to fully understand Paul Gauguin the artist without paying due attention to them.

His first important series of prints – the so-called *Suite Volpini* of zincographs in black on brilliant yellow paper – dates to 1889. This series draws together the artistic advances Gauguin had made during his time in Brittany and on Martinique; it is also an early demonstration of his growing interest in faraway, exotic lands. During and after his first voyage to the South Seas in 1891/92, his prints reached an early high point represented by the complex *Noa Noa* series, one of the most fascinating manifestations of modern art. The sheet that gives this series its title – and probably the earliest work in this group – forms one of the highlights of the present exhibition. During his intense, lingering bouts of illness Gauguin's production of graphic work increased and by 1895, when he returned to Tahiti, this was his main artistic activity. Looking at his prints as a whole, the cliché of the “savage” artist seems to be confirmed at first sight. In these series we see Gauguin flaunting all of the conventions of commercial prints, despite the fact that they were actually published, bound and intended for sale and, in this form, decisively shaped the concept of Symbolism. However, on closer examination the art in these works proves to be radical and insightful to equal degrees and lays bare the drama of a complex persona beset with doubts, longings and fears. The ideal way to present this interesting, complicated work is to start with an overview and continue by casting light on details of its techniques and themes. Daily life, exotic myths, Western religion and ancient beliefs involving ancestors and demons mingle audaciously in them, whetting one's appetite for a deeper understanding of these motifs. Gauguin's graphic works are like a mirror in which an artist on a never-ending quest sees himself reflected, seeks reassurance, fails and triumphs.

Gauguin printed many of his works himself. Because he had never been taught this highly-specialised skill his prints seem clumsy at first glance, as for instance when plates or blocks with different motifs and colours have been printed atop one another, resulting