

# Gallery texts exhibition *Van Gogh & Japan*

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## Floor -1

### Introduction Van Gogh & Japan

Vincent van Gogh was a great admirer of Japanese prints. His work changed profoundly under the influence of these exotic, brightly coloured scenes with their unique style. Van Gogh believed that the art of the future should be colourful, and for him, Japan pointed the way.

Van Gogh never visited Japan. He studied prints carefully and read about Japanese art. This gave him an idealised picture of the country. The hundreds of prints in his collection inspired him to look for his own 'Japan' in southern France. He saw that region as a paradise much like Japan, with plenty of sun, beautiful nature, bright light and pure colours. That was where he made his most colourful paintings and most skilful drawings, in a style influenced by the Japanese masters.

By making art in the Japanese tradition, Van Gogh wished to contribute to modern art. But when he fell ill, he had to rethink his ambitions and give up that dream. His idealised image of Japan then faded into the background. Yet by that time, this Asian influence had changed his art forever.

### Gallery text: Discovering Japanese prints

Van Gogh first encountered Japanese colour woodcuts, *ukiyo-e*, during his stay in Paris (1886-1888). The city was in the middle of a great Japan craze. Van Gogh bought about 600 prints. He planned to trade them at first but soon became enchanted with the cheerful, colourful scenes.

The prints offered a different approach to composition and perspective, unlike in Western art, with clear divisions of the picture plane and strong outlines. Van Gogh was in search of a modern, more decorative style of painting, and his Japanese prints were his most important models. He especially focused on flat areas of bright colour.

Van Gogh painted three copies of Japanese prints to master this new style. One of them is *Courtesan (after Eisen)*. In his still lifes, he tried to recreate the distinctive texture of Japanese prints on crumpled paper. These early experiments, based on Japanese examples, sent his art in a new direction.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Flowering Plum Orchard (after Hiroshige)*, 1887**

This was Van Gogh's first painting based on a Japanese print. He used the colour woodcut next to it as a model. Copying was a useful exercise for gaining a practical command of Japanese aesthetics. Van Gogh used much bolder colours than the

original print. The woodcut was narrower than his canvas, so he decorated the extra space on either side with Japanese characters from a different print.

**Colour woodcut: Utagawa Hiroshige, *Ishiyakushi: The Yoshitsune Cherry Tree near the Noriyori Shrine*, from the series Famous Places near the 53 Stations [Along the Tōkaidō], 1855**

Van Gogh bought stacks of Japanese prints at Siegfried Bing's art gallery in Paris. He generally preferred landscapes, compositions with finely dressed women and prints of actors in the Kabuki theatre. Most of the landscape prints are by Utagawa Hiroshige – for example, this blossoming cherry tree. Van Gogh's print collection includes a striking number of trees with gnarled branches, as well as blossoming plum and cherry trees – subjects he often chose for his own work.

**Colour woodcut: Togaku, *Finches and Pomegranates*, from the series Illustrations of Plants, Trees, Flowers and Birds**

This colourful print of birds and flowers is an example of a *crépon*. There were quite a few prints of this kind in Van Gogh's collection. The wrinkled surface of these prints is reminiscent of fabric. First, the scene was printed on ordinary paper. Then the print was crumpled mechanically to create a texture like crêpe fabric.

**Magazine in showcase: Cover of *Paris Illustré*, Le Japon, 1 May 1886**

The magazine *Paris Illustré* devoted a special issue to Japan in 1886. It offered an introduction to Japanese culture and history. Along with the book *L'Art japonais* (also in this display case), this magazine was Van Gogh's main source of information about Japan. He used the *Paris Illustré* cover image as a model for his painting *Courtesan*, hanging in this gallery.

**Gallery text: Japonisme in Paris**

Late 19th-century Paris was gripped by a craze for everything Japanese. For a long time, Japan had been closed off from the rest of the world. In 1854 the country was opened to foreign trade. Soon afterwards the European market was flooded with Japanese art and crafts.

At the Paris world's fairs of 1867 and 1878, more Japanese items were on display than ever before. That fuelled enthusiasm for collecting them. Many art galleries and even department stores sold Japanese objects. Paris fell head over heels in love with their refined and exotic designs.

Many artists took inspiration from *ukiyo-e* prints, with their compositions and colour fields that were surprising to Western eyes. Japonisme was at its height.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *In the Café: Agostina Segatori in Le Tambourin*, 1887**

In this portrait, Van Gogh shows his friend Agostina Segatori in her café. In the right background, a Japanese scene is visible. It's a picture of a courtesan, much like the print next to this painting. Van Gogh organised a sale exhibition of Japanese prints from his collection in Segatori's café. He was unable to find buyers for the prints, but the exhibition did give him the chance to study them at length.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Vase of Flowers*, 1886**

In the summer of 1886, Van Gogh painted a large number of colourful flower still lifes. In a letter, he compared a few of those paintings to Japanese lacquer inlaid with mother-of-pearl. In this still life, he combined a black background with flat, almost schematic flowers. The effect really is comparable to that of Japanese lacquer, a coveted item in those days. An example is on display next to this painting.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Père Tanguy*, 1887**

The paint dealer Julien (Père) Tanguy was a good friend of Van Gogh's. The background of his portrait includes Mount Fuji, stalks of bamboo and a flock of birds. Van Gogh adopted these elements from the two Hiroshige prints next to this portrait. Van Gogh admired Tanguy's inner calm and practical wisdom. Could that have been why he placed him in this Oriental context? He also gave Tanguy an Asian appearance, by painting him with slightly squinted eyes.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Quinces, Lemons, Pears and Grapes*, 1887**

Here Van Gogh tried to achieve a decorative effect, by leaving the background abstract and using many shades of yellow, even on the frame. His brushwork was intended to imitate the texture of *crépons*, prints with a wrinkled surface. The angular strokes of paint on the frame look like Japanese characters. In a portrait of Père Tanguy, he included this still life in the background alongside Japanese prints from his collection.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Courtesan (after Eisen)*, 1887**

This was Van Gogh's third and last painting based on a Japanese print. He used the image by Kesai Eisen that had appeared on the cover of the magazine *Paris Illustré* in 1886. Around his courtesan, Van Gogh painted bamboo stems, water plants, frogs and cranes, all borrowed from other prints. This was his way of depicting the beauty of Japan as he found it in prints of beautiful women enjoying themselves in idyllic landscapes.

## Gallery text: Southern France as Japan

Two intensive years in Paris left Van Gogh completely exhausted. In search of a warmer climate and more peaceful surroundings, he went to live in Arles in southern France. There he hoped to find the same bright light and cheerful colour effects he had seen in Japanese prints.

The region exceeded all his expectations. He felt just as if he was in Japan. He had brought only a few Japanese prints with him from Paris, but the natural beauty around him offered plenty of inspiration. The southern light turned everything into 'Japan', from the orchards in blossom to the sweeping views.

This filled him with new energy and heightened his ambitions. He painted one sun-drenched, colourful landscape after another. When he chose his subjects, he often had his idealised image of Japan in mind. Snow-covered landscapes and mountains with fanciful shapes reminded him of the prints, and he described a field of irises as being just like 'a Japanese dream'.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Snowy Landscape with Arles in the Background*, 1888**

During his railway journey to southern France, Van Gogh kept looking eagerly out of the window to see 'if it was like Japan yet', as he later wrote. When he arrived in Arles, there was snow on the ground. The snowy fields reminded him of the winter landscapes depicted by Japanese artists. He especially enjoyed the combination of the white fields and the blue sky. In this painting, he captured that effect.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *La Crau with Peach Trees in Blossom*, 1889**

Each spring, the fruit trees around Arles were in luxuriant blossom. Van Gogh devoted many paintings to this cheerful subject. He made this landscape at the same spot where he had painted wheat fields the previous summer (*The Harvest*, to the right). The view reminded him of Dutch landscapes and, most of all, of Japanese prints. 'Everything there is small, the gardens, the fields, the gardens, the trees, even those mountains, as in certain Japanese landscapes, that's why this subject attracted me.'

### **Colour woodcuts: Utagawa Hiroshige, *Irises at Horikiri, from the series Reflections on Water at Famous Places in Edo*, 1852**

Along with blossoming trees and Mount Fuji, irises are also a well-loved subject in Japanese art. In this print, beautifully dressed women are viewing irises in Horikiri Garden in Edo, now Tokyo. The image of rural Japan presented by printmakers coloured Van Gogh's perspective on southern France. He had prints like this one in mind when he called his painting *Field with Irises near Arles* a 'Japanese dream'.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Entrance to a Quarry*, 1889**

Van Gogh painted this quarry in Saint-Rémy in the summer of 1889. He used firm outlines and large, well-defined areas of colour. He felt that there was something Japanese about the scene: 'You'll well remember that there are Japanese drawings of rocks where grasses and little trees grow here and there.' One such print, by Hiroshige, hangs opposite this painting.

### **Gallery text: Seeing with a Japanese eye**

The more time Van Gogh spent in southern France, the more he drew and painted nature in the manner of Japanese prints. The characteristics of such prints include the division of the picture plane into lines and colour areas, as well as a simple approach to perspective. There is often no pictorial depth, or else it is suggested solely by a diagonal line. The scene often does not include the horizon. Subjects may be abruptly cut off at the edges of the picture plane. Details from nature are visible in close-up in the foreground.

Van Gogh experimented with all these characteristics. He sometimes let go of the illusion of space or zoomed in on his subject. The prints helped him search for simplicity in his compositions. The greatest challenge for him was to think in terms of large areas of colour – in other words, to abstract away from reality. He gradually

### **Painting, Vincent van Gogh, *Wheatfield*, 1890**

In painting this wheat field, Van Gogh chose to use a strong diagonal that guides your gaze into the distance. He did the same thing in the two paintings to the left, *The Langlois Bridge* and another *Wheat Field*. Japanese artists often used this method of suggesting depth. They also frequently used an elevated point of view in their work. The perspective in Van Gogh's painting is unusual, combining a high horizon with a close-up view of the grass and wheat in the foreground.

### **Painting, Vincent van Gogh, *Corner of a Garden with Butterflies*, 1887**

You look down from above at the butterflies in the grass. Tight close-ups of this kind are often used in Japanese prints. Van Gogh's choice of this subject reflected his admiration for the attention that Japanese artists brought to natural details. He painted this simple subject in bright colours with expressive brushwork.

### **Painting, Vincent van Gogh, *The Sower*, 1888**

Like Japanese printmakers, Van Gogh liked to place large elements in the foreground, like this gnarled tree. The two paintings next to this one also include

trees in the middle of the picture plane. In *The Sower*, Van Gogh opted for a highly simplified composition, using large colour fields with strong outlines. The bright colours enhance the abstract effect.

### **Colour woodcut: Utagawa Hiroshige, A crane in a tree at sunset, c. 1852**

Hiroshige was one of the best known and most productive printmakers of the early 19th century. This group of prints shows how inventive he was in his compositions. In *A crane in a tree at sunset*, he placed a large sun behind the bird and the tree branch. Van Gogh did the same thing in *The Sower*, opposite this print. Is it possible that he was inspired by Hiroshige's prints?

### **Colour woodcut: Utagawa Hiroshige, A Crab on the Seashore c. 1820-1825**

Van Gogh's still lifes of crabs have their origins in this popular subject in East Asian art. This Kunisada print is a *surimono*, an exclusive type of print combining an image with one or more poems. Crabs often appear in surimono prints, as the personal emblems of the poet Bunbunsha Kanikomaru. He is the author of one of the two poems in this print.

### **Magazine in showcase: Siegfried Bing, Study of Grass, from *Le Japon artistique, Documents d'Art et d'Industrie*, no. 1, May 1888**

One remarkable feature of Japanese art is the attention given to representing even the smallest natural details. Van Gogh praised the devotion of Japanese artists, who studied 'a single blade of grass' as a way of understanding the world. He regarded this study of grass as an admirable example of artistic precision and hung it on the wall of his studio.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Butterflies and Poppies*, 1889**

While staying in the hospital in Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh made many drawings and paintings in the garden. These small studies of details from nature look a great deal like Japanese prints of birds and flowers. Besides loose prints, Van Gogh also owned two leporello albums (books folded like an accordion) of this kind of intensely colourful scenes. They are in the display case next to this painting.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Almond Blossom*, 1890**

Blossom is a symbol of spring and new life. Van Gogh painted *Almond Blossom* in honour of the birth of his nephew, Theo's son. The painting has an unusual composition, looking upwards at the blossoming branches against the blue sky. This approach is not uncommon in Japanese prints, such as Hokusai's *Bullfinch and Weeping Cherry* (on display nearby).

## Begane grond

### Gallery text: The Japanese ideal

Van Gogh was eager to contribute to the development of a modern painting style. His fantasy of Japan was an important role. He had read about the mentality of Japanese artists. Van Gogh saw them as humble artisans, living and working together in harmony like monks in a monastery. He hoped to achieve the same ideal in Arles, by establishing an artists' colony there.

Van Gogh was also charmed by the idea that Japanese artists exchanged art works with each other. He asked his artist friends Paul Gauguin and Émile Bernard to send him portraits. And Van Gogh sent a portrait to Gauguin of himself as a Japanese bonze, a Buddhist monk. Like his *Self-portrait with Bandaged Ear*, with a Japanese print in the background, it illustrates the strong connection he felt to Japan.

#### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Self-portrait*, 1888**

Van Gogh wrote about this portrait that he had portrayed himself as 'a bonze, a humble worshipper of the eternal Buddha'. A bonze is a monk from Japan. Van Gogh depicted himself with a shaved head and somewhat slanted eyes. He sent the painting to Paul Gauguin, who had just sent him a self-portrait. Van Gogh saw Gauguin as the leader of the artists' studio that he wanted to establish in Arles.

#### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, 1889**

Van Gogh made this self-portrait in his studio in Arles, shortly after his return home from the hospital. The bandage on his head is a reminder of the psychotic attack in which he cut off his left ear. In the background, there is a fresh canvas on the easel. Van Gogh hoped that continuing to work would help him to recover. The Japanese print on the wall – one of his favourites – symbolises his fantasy of the south as a paradise for painters.

#### **Hanging scroll: anonymous, *Geishas in a Landscape*, 1870-1880**

This colourful *crépon* was one of Van Gogh's favourite prints. This was how he saw Japan: as an ideal world full of beauty and harmony, with attractive women surrounded by birds, flowers and other wonders of nature. For his painting *Courtesan* from 1887 (also included in this exhibition), he borrowed the crane and the two women in the small boat. He even gave the print a prominent place in his self-portrait with bandaged ear (to the left).

#### **Painting: Paul Gauguin, *Self-Portrait with Portrait of Émile Bernard (Les misérables)*, 1888**

Van Gogh suggested to Gauguin and Bernard that they exchange work, like Japanese artists. His friends each made a self-portrait with the other artist's portrait in the background. Gauguin portrayed himself as Jean Valjean, the main character in

Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*. He saw a connection between that tragic hero and the misunderstood artists of his own time. In return, Van Gogh sent a symbolic portrait of himself as a Japanese monk.

### Gallery text: Colour and cheerfulness

The most ambitious art works made by Van Gogh in Arles were paintings dominated by large areas of colour. When he visited the Mediterranean coast, he realised that the colours there were even more intense. From that time on, he went looking for increasingly vivid colours, for instance in his portrait *The Zouave*. In his painting *The Bedroom*, he used areas in bright hues, leaving out the shadows.

Van Gogh's greatest wish was to contribute to modern art by painting powerful, colourful portraits. He painted such portraits while Gauguin was visiting him in Arles. Gauguin encouraged him to render his subjects in a more abstract way. Van Gogh applied everything he had learned from Japanese art, making greater use of it than ever.

In his portraits, he used bold hues, firm outlines and a vividly coloured background. The results are reminiscent of Japanese prints portraying actors. The high point in this series was *La Berceuse (Woman Rocking a Cradle)*, which he painted in vibrant colours against a decorative flower pattern.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Blue Gloves and a Basket of Oranges and Lemons*, 1889**

Van Gogh painted this still life in January 1889. The previous year he had depicted the same subject in *Basket with Oranges* (to the left). The Japanese influence is shown by the distinct colour fields and the contrast between the bluish-turquoise background and the yellow and orange fruit. The cypress branches give this still life a southern quality. Van Gogh personally felt that the painting had 'an almost chic little look to it'.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Two Lovers*, 1888**

In Arles, Van Gogh wanted to make paintings that were like Japanese prints, with areas of vibrant colour and stylised lines. His first attempt dates from a month after his arrival. He painted a bridge at sunset in 'colours like stained glass'. But he was not satisfied and later destroyed the painting. He saved only this small fragment, which shows a sailor and his girlfriend walking along the shoreline.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Seascape near Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*, 1888**

'Now that I've seen the sea here I really feel the importance there is in staying in the south and feeling — if the colour has to be even more exaggerated — Africa not far away from one.' Van Gogh wrote these words after his visit to the fishing village of Saintes-Maries on the Mediterranean coast. While he was there, he painted two seascapes. As in some of Hiroshige's prints, blue plays a dominant role in this painting, counterbalanced by a vivid shade of red.

#### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Dance Hall in Arles*, 1888**

Van Gogh painted this hall filled with colourful partygoers while working with Gauguin in Arles. The two artists had very different approaches to their work, but they both admired Japanese prints. In his rivalry with Gauguin, Van Gogh kept taking the Japanese style further and further. In *Dance Hall in Arles*, this is visible in the many colour areas piled together, the high vantage point and the decorative foreground, which in this case is made up largely of the hair of the Arlésiennes.

#### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *The Bedroom*, 1888**

Van Gogh wanted *The Bedroom* to express 'utter repose', and he achieved that by using 'flat, plain tints like Japanese prints'. The colour harmony that he sought has been thrown off somewhat, because one red pigment has changed colour over time. The walls and doors were originally a pale violet but are now blue. That heightens the contrast with the yellow.

#### **Album in showcase: Album composed by Paul Gachet Jr., with 14 Japanese colour woodcuts from the collection of Vincent van Gogh**

Van Gogh always had Japanese prints around, even in the last two months of his life, when he lived in Auvers-sur-Oise. After his death, some of those prints came into the hands of his doctor, Paul-Ferdinand Gachet. The doctor's son, Paul Gachet Jr., combined fourteen of those prints into this album in memory of Van Gogh. Most are brightly coloured portraits of actors, a genre that Van Gogh liked very much.

#### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *The Arlésienne (Marie Ginoux)*, 1888**

Van Gogh's figures are often dark silhouettes against a light background, like the ones in many Japanese prints. The strong outlines and large areas of colour also show the influence of Japanese printmakers. Marie Ginoux, the wife of the local café proprietor, is dressed in the traditional costume of the area. Van Gogh was very satisfied with this portrait – because just as the courtesan stood for Japan, the Arlésienne symbolised southern France.

#### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Woman rocking the cradle (Augustine Roulin)*, 1889**

Here Van Gogh painted the wife of the postman Joseph Roulin in loud colours. The cord in her hand is for rocking her baby's cradle. Van Gogh compared this portrait to 'colour prints from a bazaar'. The division into areas of colour, the firm contours and

the dahlias in the background suggest that he was inspired mainly by Japanese woodcuts.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Camille Roulin*, 1888**

Camille was the 11-year-old son of Joseph and Augustine Roulin. Van Gogh divided the background of this portrait into two areas of colour, an effect also seen in some vividly coloured Japanese prints. Examples of such prints hang opposite this portrait. Van Gogh also painted Camille against a bright yellow background; that portrait hangs elsewhere on this wall.

### **Gallery text: Drawing like Japanese artists**

The drawings that Van Gogh made during his years in southern France show an unmistakable Japanese influence. In Japanese drawings, the use of line is simple and always fluid. Van Gogh's greatest inspiration in this respect was Katsushika Hokusai, who had by then become Japan's most famous draughtsman. Following Hokusai's example, Van Gogh used dots, vertical lines, hatching and short dashes. He tried to match Japanese artists' calligraphic quality in his reed pen drawings. These works are both skilful and spontaneous – highlights in Van Gogh's oeuvre.

### **Hanging scroll: Fujimoto Tesseki, *An imagined Chinese mountain landscape*, c. 1855**

Van Gogh felt that his pen drawings looked like Japanese prints. His style of drawing is certainly similar to the skilful way in which Asian artists depicted nature. Van Gogh's shining example, Hokusai, was a master of this method, which involved quick lines, dots and dashes. *Nanga*, Japanese ink paintings in the Chinese tradition, show the same skill in drawing, and those may have inspired Van Gogh as well.

### **Colour woodcut: Katsushika Hokusai, *Under the wave off Kanagawa*, from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, c. 1830-1832**

In the West, Hokusai is regarded as the most remarkable artist Japan ever produced. Van Gogh spoke highly of the way Hokusai suggested 'some emotion, an ardent temperament' in this print. 'These waves are claws, the boat is caught in them, you can feel it. Ah well, if we made the colour very correct or the drawing very correct, we wouldn't create those emotions.'

### **Drawing: Vincent van Gogh, *La Crau Seen from Montmajour*, 1888**

Van Gogh believed his pen drawings from the hill of Montmajour were the finest he had ever made. This one was inspired by the varied use of line in Japanese

drawings. Van Gogh described this series of his as drawings 'which DON'T LOOK JAPANESE and which are perhaps more so than others, in fact'.

### **Drawing: Vincent van Gogh, *Mowed Lawn with Weeping Willow*, 1888**

In the summer of 1888, Van Gogh made a series of drawings after paintings he had made not long before. They were more stylised than his earlier drawings, and he wrote that they had 'a certain Japanese look'. This quality was reinforced by their presentation. For instance, he surrounded this drawing with strips of marbled paper, following the example of Japanese prints with ornamental borders. One such print from Van Gogh's collection is on display in the showcase.

### **Gallery text: After the dream**

When Van Gogh became ill, he gave up his ambitions for a new form of art based on Japanese models. His collaboration with Gauguin had ended, and he had failed to achieve his dream of an artists' colony. Van Gogh had himself admitted to the hospital in Saint-Rémy and painted natural scenes in the vicinity. He spent the last two months of his life in the country village of Auvers-sur-Oise. He no longer chose to use large areas of colour or intense colour combinations in his compositions.

But Van Gogh still loved Japanese prints. Although they had become less important to him as artistic models, he was still influenced by the Japanese way of seeing. In Saint-Rémy and Auvers, he went on using ideas from Japanese art, such as a bird's-eye view or trees that cut across the picture plane. The prints even inspired him to paint an exceptionally difficult subject: pouring rain.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Undergrowth*, 1889**

The hospital garden was a sheltered environment in which Van Gogh could work. Since he was worried he might have another breakdown, he tried to make less mental effort. Instead of colour contrasts, he began to search for harmony, and he replaced his rapid style of painting with a more deliberate approach. That is clearly illustrated by this painting. The high vantage point and the cropping of the scene give the work a very Japanese character.

### **Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Field with Poppies*, 1889**

These fields were behind the hospital. This was the first painting that Van Gogh made outside the hospital walls. The composition – a view from above, with no visible horizon – shows that the Japanese visual idiom had become a firm part of Van Gogh's way of seeing. At the point where the lines of the walls and the fields meet, the mountains begin. Van Gogh merely hinted at those, in bluish purple and white.

**Painting: Vincent van Gogh, *Rain, Auvers*, 1890**

Just like *Undergrowth with Two Figures*, this painting has a high horizon and bold lines reminiscent of Japanese prints. The subject is also distinctively Japanese. Rain was a favourite theme among Japanese artists, and Van Gogh had painted it earlier in his copy of Hiroshige's *Bridge in the Rain*. Here he painted the rain with powerful parallel brushstrokes that make the landscape more intense.

**Colour woodcut: Utagawa Hiroshige, *Suhara*, from the series The Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaidō, 1835-1838**

On his way from Saint-Rémy to his new home in Auvers in May 1890, Van Gogh spent a few days with his brother Theo in Paris. There he saw friends and visited exhibitions, probably including the major survey exhibition of Japanese prints in the École des Beaux-Arts. A number of prints on display there showed scenes in the rain, a popular subject in Japanese art and one that Van Gogh had always very much appreciated.