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Seattle's elusive treasure, the Gauguin exhibit at Seattle Art Museum

Years in the making, the Seattle Art Museum's exhibition of work by Paul Gauguin is offered to art lovers only here and in Copenhagen. Enjoy the show through April 29.

Seattle Times Editorial

DAZZLING is the defining word for the extraordinary display of work by Paul Gauguin at the Seattle Art Museum. The exhibit is another dual triumph of art and culture, and SAM's capacity to bring rare treats to Puget Sound.

The exhibit, which runs through April 29, is titled "Gauguin & Polynesia: An Elusive Paradise." One of the strengths of the show is not only to get up close to the scenes and colors of Gauguin's life in Oceania, but also to see an equal ration of Polynesian masterworks.

Seattle and Copenhagen are the only two cities to share in this exhibit, which is the result of paintings, carvings and sculpture loaned, gathered and organized by Art Centre Basel. Efforts to nurture and bring this exhibit to Seattle began years ago, under former SAM director Mimi Gates.

Visitors to the museum will find an exhibit that blends Gauguin's art with the influences that literally colored his view of the world. Credit SAM co-curators Chiyo Ishikawa and Pam McClusky with the skills to display the art and explore the artist's inspirations.

Gauguin's work on canvas and burlap are a window on French colonization of Polynesia and a personal story of doubt, torment and religious tension in pursuit of, indeed, an elusive paradise.

The artist's restless life has him searching for his place in the art world, the natural world and domestic life, of a sort.

The Polynesian art treasures are a delight because of their cultural insights, and the pure talent and patience that brought detailed works to life.

SAM's Gauguin exhibit has the capacity to rival the Picasso exhibition as an event and economic powerhouse. Spending on admissions, food and beverages, lodging, travel, souvenirs, entertainment and parking can put millions into the regional economy. Arts and culture have a financial clout that rarely gets its due.

The vivid colors of Gauguin's art and the Polynesian work that inspired him are a marvelous antidote to gray winter days.