

Emil Bührle Collection

Media release

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Agreement on the painting *La route montante* by Paul Gauguin



Paul Gauguin
La route montante (*The Street*)
1884
Oil on canvas
46 x 38 cm

Agreement between the E.G. Bührle Collection Foundation and the legal successors of Richard Semmel regarding the painting *La route montante* by Paul Gauguin to remain in the Emil Bührle Collection

The legal successors of Richard Semmel (1875-1950) – the granddaughters of Grete Gross, an acquaintance of the Semmel couple – and the Bührle Foundation as the current owner of the painting ‘La route montante’ by Paul Gauguin have agreed on a settlement due to Semmel’s life circumstances and his emigration as a result of Nazi persecution. Semmel sold the painting in Geneva in 1937 through the art trade. The painting will remain in the Emil Bührle Collection and can continue to be exhibited at the Kunsthaus Zürich. The parties have agreed to keep the details of the agreement confidential.

Emil Bührle acquired the painting «La Route montante» in March 1937 at an auction at the Moos Gallery in Geneva. Richard Semmel, a German-Jewish businessman and art collector had consigned the painting for sale for the first time to art auctions in June 1933 in Amsterdam and a second time in March 1937 in Geneva. At that time, Semmel was in the Netherlands, fleeing Nazi persecution with his wife Clara. In 1939, the couple fled via Santiago de Chile to New York, where Richard Semmel died in 1950, widowed, impoverished and childless.

Against the backdrop of Nazi persecution, the Bührle Foundation and Richard Semmel's legal successors have agreed on a mutually acceptable settlement.

Richard and Clara Semmel

The painting *La route montante* by Paul Gauguin belonged to the collection of the Berlin-based German-Jewish textile entrepreneur Richard Semmel (1875-1950). Richard Semmel originated from Sobotka in Lower Silesia (now Poland). He was married to Clara Căcilie (née Bruck, 1879-1945) and had no children. He owned the Berlin laundry factory Arthur Samulon & Co., of which he had been the sole shareholder of since 1919. From 1929 onwards, he lost part of his fortune and was severely affected by the consequences of the global economic crisis.

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In April 1933, Semmel was forced to flee Berlin with his wife due to his Jewish heritage and political involvement (he was a member to the left-wing liberal German Democratic Party in the Weimar Republic). The couple fled to the Netherlands, where Richard Semmel's brother already lived. He was able to take parts of his valuable art collection with him. In order to finance his living expenses and cover discriminatory and other liabilities in Germany, Semmel consigned works of art to Mensing & fils (Muller & Cie) Amsterdam for auction in June and November 1933. Some of the works were sold at auction, while others failed to find buyers. In June 1939, Semmel and his wife continued their escape to New York via Santiago de Chile, arriving on 21 March 1941. Life in New York was difficult, and the couple lived modestly. Clara Semmel died in 1945. Following her death, Grete Gross, née Eisenstaedt (1887-1958), an acquaintance of the Semmels from their time in Berlin and, according to reports from the Gross family, Semmel's final life partner, looked after Richard Semmel, who was in poor health. He appointed Grete Gross as his sole heir.

The painting Gauguin, *La route montante*, 1884 was offered for sale at the auction *Collection d'un amateur* on 14 June 1933. It was offered for sale again on 13 June 1933 at *Tableaux modernes de l'école française des XIXe et XXe siècles* at Frederik Muller & Co in Amsterdam, as lot number 15. However, it remained unsold and was offered for sale again at the Paul Chavan auction at the Galerie Moos in Geneva on 20 March 1937 as number 63, where it was acquired by Emil Bührle.

*The **E. G. Bührle Collection Foundation** was established by the heirs of the industrialist Emil G. Bührle (1890-1956) to preserve and display significant parts of his art collection to the public in Zurich. Since 9 October 2021, these works have been on display at the Kunsthaus Zürich in David Chipperfield's new building. The foundation's collection of 203 works is one of the world's most important collections of Impressionism, featuring world-famous pieces by artists such as Van Gogh, Renoir, Cézanne, Manet, etc.*

Contact: Dr. Victor Schmid, Board of Trustees Emil G. Bührle Collection
+41 79 350 05 37
victor.schmid@viscoma.ch