

## English script for the exhibition “Bicentenary Julien Tanguy, called Père Tanguy”

This free, open-air exhibition features 40 displays retracing the life of Julien Tanguy, arranged along a 2.5 km route in Plédran’s downtown, his hometown. To discover on foot or by bike, and for all audiences.

### Display:

1. Do you know these people?

**Emile Zola** (1840 – 1902) was a writer, a committed journalist and an art critic. He originated the literary naturalist movement and wrote famous works such as *Germinal*, *L'Assommoir*, *La Fortune des Rougon* and *Le Ventre de Paris*.

**Paul Cézanne** (1839 – 1906) was a singular painter who created a unique and personal style. He is considered to be one of the precursors of Impressionism and also of modern painting.

**Claude Monet** (1840 – 1926) was a painter and is regarded as one of the leaders in Impressionism. In 1862, he became friends with the painters Johan Barthold Jongkind and then with Camille Pissarro. He stayed in Giverny from 1883 to his death.

2. Do you know the common character to all these famous artists?

**Paul Gauguin** (1848 – 1903) was a descendant of a Peruvian viceroy through his mother. In 1872, he married a young Danish woman, and together they raised 5 children. Recruited by the Parisian stockbroker Bertin, he began a collection of Impressionist paintings. He himself started to paint in 1873 with the help of his new friend Camille Pissarro.

**Émile Bernard** (1868 – 1941) met Paul Gauguin for the first time in 1886. They met again in Pont-Aven in 1888, at a pivotal moment in their artistic journeys. While Émile Bernard initiated Cloisonnism, Paul Gauguin created Symbolism, both giving birth to **Pont-Aven School**.

**Pierre-Auguste Renoir** (1841 – 1919) was a major Impressionist painter. **Jean**, one of his 3 sons, became the **first world-famous French film director**.

**Vincent van Gogh** (1853 – 1890), emigrated from the Netherlands to France and was mostly self-taught and misunderstood his whole life. He is now one of the most famous painters in the world.

3. The most famous artists of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century called him “**Father**”. Have you heard of him?
4. Julien Tanguy, affectionately called “Père Tanguy”, was born in **Plédran** on June 28, 1825. Émile Bernard painted his portrait and wrote: “**Without Tanguy, what would have become of me?**” and “**He became the father of my painting and of my career.**”
5. *Tanguy’s birth certificate, signed by the mayor of Plédran, M. François Le Nouvel (document exposed in Plédran town hall)*  
**Julien, François Tanguy** was the youngest of 10 children. He was born on June 28, 1825, in Plédran. His father, **Louis, Jean, Tanguy**, age 43 (born in Plaintel on October 10, 1781, died in Plédran on June 16, 1839) was a weaver, and his mother **Jeanne, Françoise, Goulvestre**, age 41 (born in Plédran on September 3, 1789, died also in Plédran on March 23, 1851) was a linen spinner.

6. *Julien Tanguy's family tree, as created by the Genealogy Center of Côtes-d'Armor*  
Julien Tanguy was born from a second marriage.  
His father **Louis Tanguy** was first married to **Catherine Le Moine** on February 25, 1802 and had 3 children with her, although only one survived.  
Widowed on May 10, 1810, he remarried on November 17 the same year **Jeanne Goulvestre**, who bore him 7 children.
7. Julien Tanguy lived in a small house located close to Plédran woods, surrounded by nature, at the top of a large green valley, at the bottom of which the river *Urne* flowed.  
Life was tough in Bretagne in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of poverty, lack of hygiene, floods as in 1822, harsh winters with a record low of - 15°C in 1830 and epidemics, like cholera in 1832. When he was born, only 3 of his brothers were still alive.  
His parents, like many poor farmers, tried to survive by benefiting of the era of the Breton “**blue gold**”, the linen fabric, working for the flax industry.
8. Julien Tanguy grew up in Plédran, a large town of 3,400 inhabitants. His youth was spent in the countryside, around his peasant-weaver parents. Like all the other children of his social condition at that period, he helped with the chores. He likely did not attend school as his parents probably could not spend the cost of 25 cents per day.  
There was not even a school in Plédran before October 15, 1833, when the mayor bought a piece of land to build a denominational school<sup>1</sup>. At that time, Julien was already 8 years old, and he was only 14 when his father passed away in 1839.  
1: Paula Giauffret, *Plédran: from the origins to the present day*, 1981, available at the media center and on sale at the town hall of Plédran.
9. Julien Tanguy, after a bad draw, was conscripted on October 24, 1846, to serve for 6 years in the 30<sup>th</sup> line regiment. At that time lots were drawn to select the young men who would go and serve into military service.  
Despite the turmoil of the revolution of 1848 when the last King of the French, Louis-Philippe, was deposed and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic established until 1852, Julien doesn't seem to have suffered any ill from dangerous military campaigns.  
He traveled to the Alps and to Paris, where his regiment was based. As he was only speaking the Gallo language, typical of the North of Bretagne, it was the opportunity for him to learn French at the age of 21.
10. *Marriage certificate between Julien, François, Tanguy and Renée, Julienne, Briens. Public archives of Saint-Brieuc, Bretagne, France.*  
Julien Tanguy returned from his military service in 1852. His mother, widowed since 1839, died in 1851. His brother Jean-François also passed away a few months later, at age 42.  
By then, his family was reduced to his brother **Auguste-François**, 8 years his senior, working as a plowman in Plédran.  
In 1853, he moved to Saint-Brieuc, became a plasterer and there met a young butcher, Renée, with whom he married at the age of 29, on April 23, 1855.
11. **Renée, Julienne Briens**, butcher in Saint-Brieuc, was born in Hillion on June 4, 1820 and was 5 years older than Julien Tanguy.  
This union joined the young woman coming from the blue of the seaside with the young Julien, who grew up in the green countryside of the interior of the territory.  
She was 35 and he was 30, when their only daughter, **Mathilde, Marie, Françoise**, was born on January 27, 1856. On the birth certificate, Julien declared that he was a butcher in Saint-Brieuc.
12. In 1860, Julien Tanguy was 35 years old, his wife Renée 40 and their little Mathilde 5, when they moved to “**go up to Paris**”, perhaps in search of a better life.  
They arrived after a grueling 2-day journey by stagecoach as the railroad did not reach Saint-Brieuc until 1863.  
Julien was hired by the railway company upon his arrival in Paris. He met one of the engineers, M. Demarne, who offered him a job as a housekeeper at **10 rue Cortot, Butte-Montmartre**.

13. Julien Tanguy then became a **color grinder** for 7 years at the **Maison Édouard** until its closure in 1867. Located on rue Clauzel, the Maison Édouard was one of the best in Paris. Therefore, Julien produced colors for the leading artists of the time, whom he began to meet.  
It was **“The turning point of his life.”**  
This demanding profession, requiring a long apprenticeship, was hazardous to health, as some toxic materials such as lead and arsenic were used without any protection. As an example, white pigments required a whole day of grinding.
14. When the Maison Édouard closed in 1867, Julien Tanguy lost his job but refused to give up his trade. He set up a small paint-grinder workshop in their tiny rooms at **10 rue Cortot, on the Butte-Montmartre**, while Renée became housekeeper.  
He started his own small business, selling his paints, brushes and canvases on foot, equipped with his “pacotille,” the name given to the peddlers’ wooden crate.
15. *“The nomad that every Breton remains could only find relief where most men would have seen a chore: to carry his goods like this was independence, it was freedom,”* recounted the painter Émile Bernard in his book.  
**Between 1852 and 1870, with the expansion of the railroad during the Second Empire under Napoleon III**, Julien Tanguy “sowed his tubes” of paint in “*places haunted by painters*”, also wrote Émile Bernard, from **Argenteuil to Auvers-sur-Oise, Barbizon, Écouen, and Sarcelles**.
16. In 1862, metal tubes were patented to preserve paint and in 1884, a portable “country” easel was invented. These innovations, as well as the expansion of the railroad, allowed painters to leave their studios **to paint on the spot** in remote and diverse landscapes.  
While selling his colors, Julien Tanguy set out on foot to meet these artists, who often were from wealthy, highly educated families. Illiterate, Julien learned from them and grew fond of these painters, becoming their “*obliging friend*”, **“whose nature was nothing but uprightness, timidity and generosity.”** (Émile Bernard).
17. Julien Tanguy met an important person in his life, **Camille Pissarro**, considered by many to be the father of the Impressionist movement. *“‘We all come from Pissarro,’ said Cézanne later.”* (Pierre Morin).  
Camille Pissarro (1830 – 1903), born in what is now the Virgin Islands, studied in France in Passy. Pupil of the painter **Jean-Baptiste Corot**, *“who advised him to go to the woods rather than to the museum”* according to Pierre Morin, he honed his craft in various academies, including in Switzerland, where the climate was conducive to innovative ideas, both artistic and political.  
*“All the arts are anarchist – when they are beautiful and fine! That is what I think,”* wrote Camille Pissarro in *Les Temps nouveaux* in December 1895.
18. The **National Guard** was created in 1789 by the voters of Paris. This liberal and republican force, in charge of public order and defense of private property, was led by General La Fayette.  
Perhaps to reconnect with his past, Julien Tanguy enlisted in this prestigious military corps from 1864 to 1871, in his own Montmartre sector, where he was a member of the 61<sup>st</sup> battalion. It was a *“sign of social and moral valorization.”* (Pierre Morin).  
But in 1870, Paris was bombarded by Bismarck's Prussians, leading to the overthrow of Napoleon III. After his capture, the new government declared the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic on September 4, 1870 and opted to pursue the war against the invader.
19. **Photo of 1900, from the “Communards’ wall” in the Père-Lachaise cemetery, where more than 20,000 children, women and men were shot in May 1871 by the Versailles Army by order of the government of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic led by Adolphe Thiers.**  
The Parisians bravely resisted the Prussian assaults between September 1870 and January 1871, despite famine, disease, numerous deaths and the harsh winter. They felt betrayed by Adolphe Thiers, who capitulated, plunging them further into poverty and forcing them to surrender.  
On March 18, 1871, a violent Parisian insurrection ensued, called the **“Commune”**, which lasted 72 days and was bloodily suppressed by order of Thiers, who had taken refuge in Versailles.  
Julien Tanguy followed the path of the Communards, narrowly escaping the death penalty.

20. Picture of **Louise Michel**, recounting the words of this committed woman: “*simple, strong, loving art and ideals, brave and free too, the woman of tomorrow will neither dominate nor be dominated.*”

Louise Michel, a fighter, a woman of letters, devoted all of her energy to the service of her political convictions.

Thiers decided to disarm Paris, sending 4,000 soldiers to recover and store 227 cannons on the Butte-Montmartre on the night of March 17, 1871, the starting point of the “Commune”.

As they were surrounded by insurgents, including National Guards and women led by Louise Michel, many Versailles soldiers sided with the rebels and were later shot.

Still assigned to this sector, Julien Tanguy “*was one of the very first to commit to the defense of Montmartre. His battalion victoriously resisted the attack by the Versailles troops on March 18, then took part in the defense of the Asnières bridge on April 9, 1871.*” (Pierre Morin).

Julien Tanguy survived the carnage of this terrible battle, as well as the so-called “*bloody week*”.

21. The Communards aspired to a “true democracy” based on innovative concepts: secular and compulsory education, separation of church and state, professional equality between men and women, divorce by mutual consent.

Paris was split in two and Julien Tanguy, whose “*opinions from the bottom of his heart were for the promised independence and for the rights of the poor,*” according to Émile Bernard, was captured on **May 23, 1871**. As his hands were not black with powder, he was not executed.

22. Like many others, Julien Tanguy was imprisoned in the Versailles jails and at the Satory camp, where death was everywhere. Louise Michel, who was also an internee there, revealed that “***One can see nothing more horrible than the nights of Satory.***”

After being sentenced to deportation to New Caledonia, he was sent on April 6, 1872 to the stinking holds of decommissioned ships in Brest, like “*L’Yonne*”. Then on May 25, 1872, he was sentenced to one year in prison and two years under police control. Released from Brest jails, he was not allowed to return to Paris and had to serve the remaining of his sentence away from his wife and daughter.

He returned then to Plédran, to live with his only brother, a plowman.

23. At 48, Julien Tanguy was finally able to return to Paris, to be with his wife and daughter who had remained at 10 rue Cortot, thanks to the good graces of the Demarne family. But the Demarne expelled them upon his return as they were against the Communard ideas.

“*It was a great sorrow for him; it cost him dearly to abandon his beloved Butte-Montmartre.*” (Émile Bernard).

Julien resumed his small business as a paint merchant and settled with his family at 14 rue Clauzel.

Émile Bernard wrote in « *Le Mercure de France* » in 1903 :

« *This modest shop had a great influence over the current generation. Called upon to do a favor to the good old Armorican, I had painted it blue to distinguish it from its mercantile neighbors. It was in its dark lair that, for nearly twenty years, the Cézannes were burned, under cover of fire, and that all of Paris, artists and amateurs, went to see them. To list its visitors would be to write about the history of contemporary art.* »

24. But Julien Tanguy struggled to rebuild his clientele. Paris was devastated following the Prussian invasion and the Commune, and many artists had died or been exiled. **Camille Pissarro**, returning from England, helped him, putting him in touch with young, penniless painters who were unknown at the time.

“***Vignon and Cézanne*** were the most diligent, but they both had the misfortune of not being rich, and moreover, they had to take out unlimited, even troublesome, loans; years passed. In turns, ***Guillaumin, Pissarro, Renoir, Gauguin, van Gogh, Oller, Mesureur, Anquetin, Signac, de Lautrec*** and many others crossed the threshold of the little black shop at number 14 and displayed their work there simultaneously.” (Émile Bernard).

25. This intense nature painting by Paul Cézanne perhaps reminded Julien Tanguy of the **Plédran** valley of his childhood.  
**Paul Cézanne** (1839 – 1906) entrusted the exclusive rights to sell his paintings to Julien Tanguy. Switching from colors to paintings, Julien took great care of them, protecting them, explaining them and promoting them.  
People came from far and wide to admire them in his small shop at 14 rue Clauzel.  
*“This monopoly almost earned him fame with the younger artists. People went to his house as if to a museum to see the few studies of the unknown artist who lived in Aix, who was dissatisfied with his work and the world, and destroyed these admired studies himself.”* (Émile Bernard).
26. Poster for Danièle Thompson's film *“Cézanne et moi”*, starring Guillaume Canet and Guillaume Gallienne, in which a short sequence takes place at Père Tanguy's.  
*“Members of the Institute, influential critics as well as reformer critics, visited the modest shop on Rue Clauzel, which, unwittingly, became the legend of Paris and the talk of the studios.”* (Émile Bernard).  
**Cézanne** and **Zola** met there and began friends, as described in the film by director, screenwriter and writer Danièle Thompson.  
Émile Bernard said of Julien Tanguy: *“He found himself at **the center of a core of people of great worth.**”*
27. Pierre-Auguste Renoir was considered one of the leading Impressionists, along with Claude Monet.  
In *Portraits and Anecdotes*, **Sacha Guitry** recounted a memory shared by his friend **Claude Monet** about Père Tanguy: *“[...] Père Tanguy was a paint merchant [...] his shop was absolutely tiny, and his window so small that only one painting could be shown at a time. That's where we each began to exhibit our paintings. On Mondays, **Sisley**, on Tuesdays, **Renoir**, on Wednesdays, **Pissarro**, **me** on Thursdays, **Bazille** on Fridays, and **Jongkind** on Saturdays. So, each of us took turns spending a day in at Père Tanguy's.”* (Pierre Morin).
28. **Alice and Octave Mirbeau** became the main supporters of his widow Renée, by involving some fifty now-famous artists and organizing an auction for her benefit.  
*Invoice from Julien Tanguy to Camille Pissarro illustrating that he gave credit to painters, sometimes over more than 10 years.*  
*“Père Tanguy, very poor himself, often went without supper to supply one of ‘these gentlemen,’ as he called them. They paid him when they could...”* wrote Octave Mirbeau (1848 – 1917), a famous and highly influential art critic who was as feared as he was sought-after, a journalist, a writer, and a patron, who *“called himself a champion of Impressionism.”*  
He had a deep respect for Julien Tanguy and asked many artists to help Renée, his penniless widow, when her husband passed away. His moving articles allowed everyone to know the truth about the poverty in which Julien had lived without ever making it public, always sharing and giving more than what he had.  
Thus, in the *Journal des débats* on Sunday, June 3, 1894, he stated: *“**The good man provided them with colors, paints, brushes and easels on credit, and he was so undemanding in payments that he ruined himself for the love of art.**”*
29. *“**But I must speak of Tanguy's great kindness, the kindness that was his hallmark and knew no bounds; nothing could stop him, neither reason nor poverty, and it made him find a way to help those who lacked the essentials. His table was always open to anyone who came to see him, and he would have felt humiliated if anyone had neglected to share it.**”* (Émile Bernard).  
**Julien Tanguy** was 61 years old when the young Dutch painter **Vincent van Gogh** (1853 – 1890) was 33.  
*“The latter, whom he had just met [in 1886], was the most regular guest in his shop; **he practically lived there [...]** So in a short time they became **great friends,**”* (Émile Bernard).

30. Julien Tanguy, known as Père Tanguy, born in Plédran on June 28, 1825, never parted with this painting, which **Auguste Rodin** purchased.  
In addition to painting supplies, Julien Tanguy sold Japanese prints in his shop. His customers became fans of this exoticism and became avid collectors. Claude Monet had more than 400 of them, and Vincent van Gogh more than 600.  
Vincent van Gogh painted three known portraits of Père Tanguy, drawing inspiration from Japanese prints.  
He portrayed him as a wise man with a “good mind”, hardened by the harsh trials he endured during his life, the “**Socrates of 14 rue Clauzel**,” as Émile Bernard tended to define him.  
As transcribed in the book *Letters to his brother Theo*<sup>1</sup>, in September 1888, Vincent van Gogh wrote to his that “**If I manage to live long enough, I will be something like Père Tanguy.**”
31. Julien Tanguy loved and modestly supported all these young unknown artists, whose paintings he was the first to exhibit and sell. These same painters, now world-famous, were rejected then by very conservative official Salons and were ridiculed for challenging academic art and initiating modern art.  
That’s when the journalist Louis Leroy took offense and criticized Claude Monet's painting, *Impression, soleil levant*, and created the term “**Impressionism**” in 1874.  
As Pierre Morin pointed out in his book, “**It turned out that Père Tanguy was right, as not only one but many of his former clients became famous**”, wrote Gustave Geffroy (1855 – 1926), journalist, art critic and historian.
32. Between 1874 and 1886, these young, rejected painters joined forces and organized 8 independent Impressionist exhibitions with poor success.  
The first Impressionist exhibition was held in the studio of the photographer Nadar, bringing together Monet, Degas, Renoir, Cézanne, Pissarro, Sisley, and Morisot. The painter **Gustave Caillebotte** (1848 - 1894) was the main patron of the following exhibitions.  
The influential art critic Octave Mirbeau (1848– 1917) wrote : “*The story of his humble and honest life is inseparable from the history of the Impressionist group, which gave us the most beautiful painters and the most admirable artists in contemporary art. **When this history is written, Père Tanguy will have his place in it.***”
33. On vacation, Pierre-Auguste Renoir sometimes left his brushes, like in **Bretagne**, which he visited as a tourist with a voracious appetite for old buildings and museums.  
The rapid expansion of the railroad under the Second Empire allowed painters to leave their studios, to travel and to capture a new light, like Renoir who went to Italy, notably to the shores of the Gulf of Salerno, and Tyrrhenian Sea.
34. Émile Bernard described in his book how Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh first met.  
“*One afternoon, when Cézanne came to Tanguy's house, he met Vincent van Gogh, who was having lunch there. They chatted together and after discussing art in general, they came to their own ideas. The latter believed he could best explain his views by showing Cézanne his paintings and asking for his opinion. [...] After inspecting everything, Cézanne, whose character was timid but violent, said to him: ‘**Honestly, you paint like a madman!**’ From then on, they felt that they would never get along and they never saw each other again.*”
35. Octave Mirbeau purchased this painting from Julien Tanguy, along with Vincent van Gogh's Sunflowers, for 800 francs in 1891, as Pierre Morin wrote in his book. He noted also “*The money from the sale went to Johanna Bonger, Theo van Gogh's widow. **The commission received by Tanguy was an elegant, roundabout way of helping the Tanguy family, whose financial situation was disastrous, so that it would not appear as a handout.***”  
Octave Mirbeau sold these two Vincent van Gogh works 90,000 francs in 1912 to the art dealer Bernheim.  
In 1987, Vincent van Gogh's painting, *Les Iris*, reached the world record of 320 million francs.  
**Like Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh entrusted many paintings to Julien Tanguy.**  
Vincent produced up to 3 paintings a day and “took them to the nearest second-hand dealer at prices that didn't even cover the materials used,” (Émile Bernard).

<sup>1</sup> L'imaginaire collection, Gallimard edition, 2008, page 436.

36. This is the only picture of the Tanguy family, with the kind permission of the Yvergniaux-Guézennec family. It shows Julien, his wife Renée, their daughter Mathilde and her husband. Please be advised that all rights are reserved.  
Although they were both very poor, Vincent van Gogh almost lived permanently at Tanguy's home, with Julien, Renée and Mathilde, from the moment they met in 1886, as Émile Bernard recounted in his book. The artist painted 3 known portraits of Père Tanguy.  
Julien provided Vincent with materials, stored and sold his paintings until the painter's tragic death and after Theodore van Gogh passed away, six months later.
37. Vincent van Gogh was interned in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence for cutting off his ear. After his release, he settled in Auvers-sur-Oise. But on July 27, 1890, he was shot by a bullet that he may or may not have fired himself.  
It took two days for him to die in his room at Auberge Ravoux. Émile Bernard recounted that **3 men watched over him as**  
*"Tanguy ran to Auvers to watch over Vincent with his brother Theodore and Docteur Gachet."*
38. Picture of the current boutique at 9 rue Clauzel, in Paris, and article published in *Mercure de France* in June 1891, announcing the opening of Julien Tanguy's new boutique at this address. This article reads:  
*"La Maison Tanguy, which houses the paintings of the main Impressionist painters, is moving to 9 rue Clauzel. It currently shows a wonderful collection of works by Vincent van Gogh, an admirable portrait of the painter Empereur by Cézanne, still lifes and landscapes by the same artist, and by Guillaumin, Gauguin, Émile Bernard, Gausson, etc.*  
*For sale: twelve photographs based on the work of Vincent van Gogh (12 francs). Enquiry at Tanguy, 9 rue Clauzel, or at the offices of Mercure de France."*
- "Mourning took hold of rue Clauzel... The visits of the two van Gogh brothers were missed."* (Émile Bernard).  
Despite the growing success of the artists he had encouraged, Julien Tanguy remained poor. **"Many of the people he trusted never reciprocated."** (Émile Bernard). On May 4, 1891, Julien Tanguy moved, with his wife Renée, from number 14 rue Clauzel, in Paris, to number 9, a slightly larger shop which would be his final home.
39. Despite all of Renée's excellent care, **Julien Tanguy** died at 69 on **February 6, 1894**, from stomach cancer, a fatal disease among color-grinders, leaving his beloved wife in deep misery.  
A century earlier, in 1788, the Liège painter Léonard Defrance had published a damning memoir on the dangers of the paint-grinder profession, becoming a pioneer in the prevention of occupational diseases. This memoir, commissioned by the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris, provided valuable insight into the paint-grinder profession. Defrance meticulously described the numerous painting processes, the general organization of the workshops, the various pigments, oils and varnishes, and the preparation of canvases and panels.  
According to Émile Bernard, Julien Tanguy initiated the Symbolist painters of the Pont-Aven School, as he was the only one to possess paintings by Cézanne, with whom they all align themselves.  
**"There is not a single Symbolist or Nabi, from Gauguin to Sérusier, who has not made the pilgrimage to rue Clauzel."** (Émile Bernard).
40. Octave Mirbeau, the benefactor, mobilized a wave of the most famous artists and organized an auction in favor of Renée at Hôtel Drouot on June 2, 1894. Her husband Julien Tanguy had told her with his dying breath: *"Don't worry, these gentlemen (namely the painters, writers, journalists, art critics) won't let you starve."* (Pierre Morin).  
Every artist donated a painting to complement Renée Tanguy's own collection. But only 10,000 francs were raised as the art dealers had banded together to keep the bidding down.  
In his magnificent article in homage to Julien Tanguy, published in *L'Écho de Paris* on February 13, 1894, Octave Mirbeau concluded: **"His life was beautiful and it was happy, because he always knew how to give it an ideal!"**