

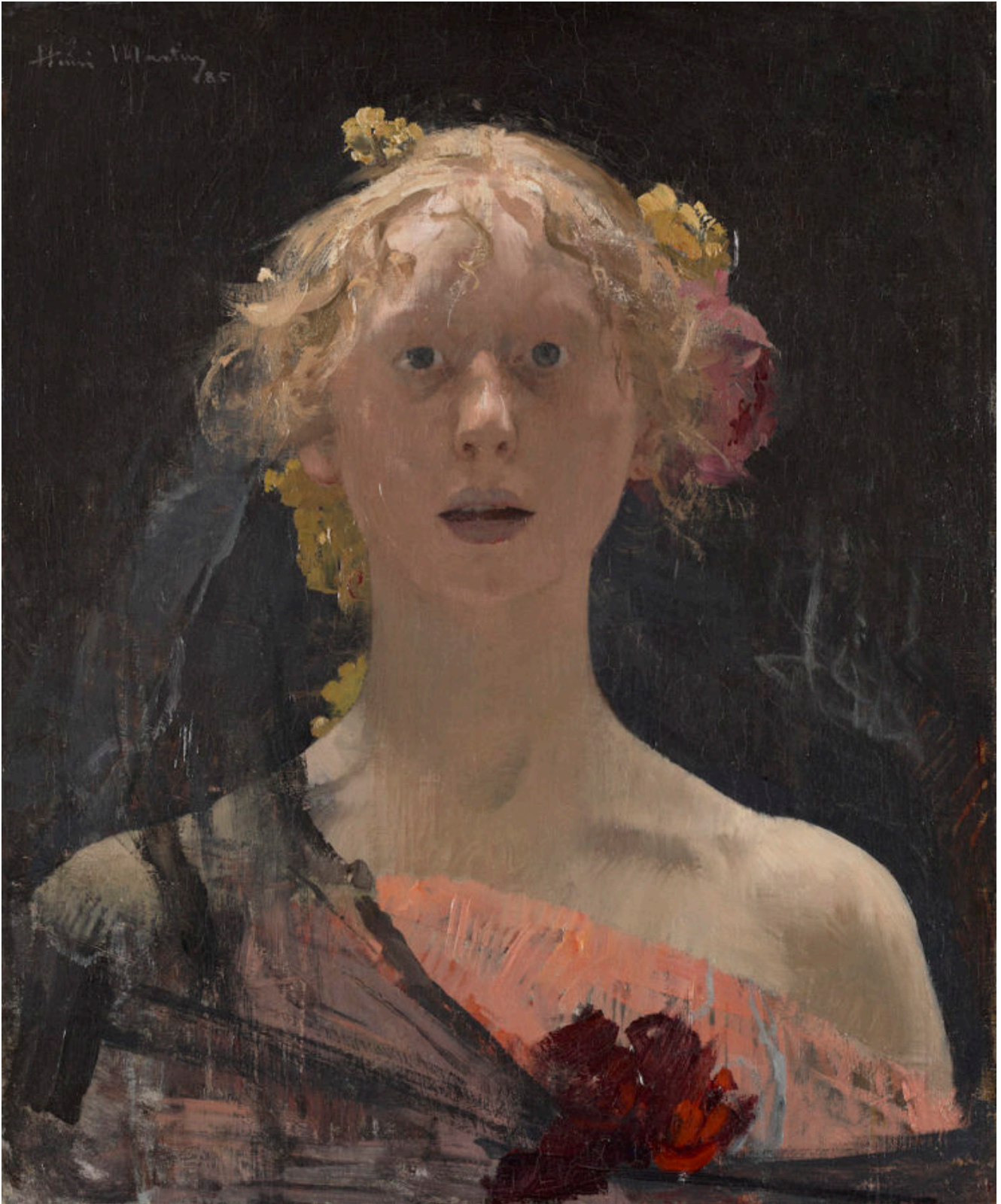
New painting for Scotland's national collection is described as 'eerie'

The newest painting to join the collection at National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) is an unusual one. The work by French artist Henri Martin who died in 1943 is now on display, the first by Martin to become part of a UK collection.

The painting is of a young woman betrothed to her obsessive cousin Egeus who became (unusually to say the least) fixated on her teeth. But before the marriage the young woman Berenice dies from a strange wasting disease, often falling into a trance before her untimely death. Her grave is later found disturbed and Egeus wakes to find a shovel and a box with 32 teeth in it.

NGS Director of European and Scottish Art and Portraiture, Christopher Baker, said: "It is a rare treat, albeit quite an uncanny one, for us to acquire such a mesmerising and unusual painting. This is a key addition to the collection because, while we have a world-renowned holding of impressionist and post-impressionist works, we have very few portraits and paintings that explore literary themes from the period. *Berenice* has great appeal, and we are sure it will be a hit with our visitors, both through its magnetic power and the gruesome tale it illustrates. This is a gothic horror

story in paint!"



Henri Martin, Berenice, 1885, oil on canvas

This work – Berenice (1885) is an early example of Symbolism an art movement with writers and paints focusing on ideas and imagination rather than naturalistic representations of the real world.

Other works by artists who were part of the movement which you can see at NGS include Paul Gauguin's *Vision of the Sermon* (1888), one of the most popular paintings in Scotland's national collection. Once hailed as the first symbolist painting, Gauguin's picture is regarded as a major example of Post-Impressionism and a key work in the history of modern art.

While Martin's work never gained the eminence of that of Gauguin and his other near contemporaries, he is well represented in French museums and was a highly regarded artist in his own right with a successful career. He trained at the École des Beaux-Arts, Toulouse from 1877-9 and later won a bursary that let him to move to Paris to study under Jean-Paul Laurens at the École des Beaux-Arts. The French state acquired a painting from him in 1882 while he was still a pupil of Laurens. In 1885, the year he completed *Berenice*, he won a bursary to travel to Italy, and began to develop an interest in literary and pictorial Symbolism. From 1887-9 Martin was also working on his magnum opus, *Fête de la Fédération*, at the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, a celebration of the centenary of the French Revolution. This work brought him considerable public and critical attention and subsequently he was in great demand for the decoration of public buildings.



Paul Gauguin, *Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)*, 1888