

# Vincent Van Gogh

1853 – 1890

(van-GO) - Dutch Post Impressionist

37



Post Impressionism – an extension of Impressionism while rejecting some limitations. Artists continued using vivid colors, distinctive brush strokes and thick paint application, but were more inclined to emphasize geometric forms, distort form, and use unnatural or arbitrary color for expressive effect.



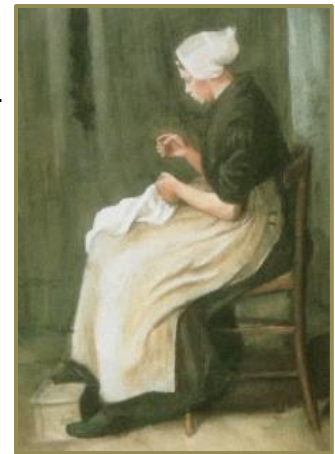
**Vincent Willem van Gogh** drew from childhood. He began painting in his late twenties, completing many of his best-known works during the last two years of his life. In just over a decade, he produced 860 oil paintings and more than 1,300 watercolors, drawings, sketches, and prints.

His younger brother, art dealer Theo, provided Vincent with both financial and emotional support all his life. Their letters give much of the information known about Vincent. He had another brother, Cor, and three sisters: Elisabeth, Anna and Willemina.



Van Gogh spent his early adulthood working for a firm of art dealers. In 1873 (20), he was transferred to London. Theo's wife remarked that this was the happiest year of Vincent's life. He was successful and he fell in love with his landlady's daughter, Eugénie, but she rejected him.

Van Gogh became a Methodist minister's assistant, following his wish to "preach the gospel everywhere." His roommate at the time recalled that van Gogh ate frugally, and preferred not to eat meat. Van Gogh felt he had found his true vocation. To support his effort to become a pastor, his family sent him to Amsterdam to study theology in 1877 (24). Vincent failed the entrance exam. He then undertook, but failed, a three-month course at a Protestant missionary school near Brussels.



In 1879 (26), he took a missionary post in a Belgium coal mining village. Acting on what he saw as Christianity's logical conclusion, Van Gogh lived like those he preached to, sleeping on straw in a small hut. His choice of squalid living did not endear him to the church authorities. He was dismissed for "undermining the dignity of the priesthood."

In 1881 (28), Van Gogh moved to the countryside with his parents, but strife increased between them. After a particular conflict, his father made inquiries about having his son committed to an asylum.

During the summer he spent time with his widowed cousin, Kee Vos-Stricker. Kee, who had an eight-year-old son, was seven years older than van Gogh. He proposed marriage, but she refused with, "No, nay, never." He kept trying but Kee refused to see him, and her parents wrote, "Your persistence is disgusting." In desperation, he held his left hand in the flame of a lamp, with the words "Let me see her for as long as I can keep my hand in the flame." Kee's father made it clear that they wouldn't be married due to Van Gogh's inability to support himself.



*Self-Portrait as an artist, 1888 (35). Photo of Theo. Woman Sewing, (Watercolor) c.1881 (28). Self-Portrait, 1887 (34).*



*Kee Vos Stricker with her son Jan, c. 1879. Peasant Woman Head 1884-85 (31-32).*

*Sketch of a knee, 1886 (33).*

*Two hands, c. 1884 (31). Digger 6.*

*Planting Beets, 1885 (32).*





Portrait of a One Eyed Man, 1888 (35).



Van Gogh followed Theo's suggestion to take up art in earnest. Van Gogh aspired to be an artist in God's service, stating: "...to try to understand... what the great artists... tell us in their masterpieces, that leads to God; one man wrote... it in a book; another in a picture."

Van Gogh said of painting portraits, "The only thing in painting that excites me to the depths of my soul, and which makes me feel the infinite more than anything else." "In a picture I want to say something comforting as music is comforting. I want to paint men and women with that something of the eternal which the halo used to symbolize."

In 1884 (31), Margot Begemann, a neighbor's daughter and ten years older, often joined him on his painting forays. They decided to marry, but the idea was opposed by both families. As a result, Margot took an overdose of strychnine. She was saved when Van Gogh rushed her to a nearby hospital.

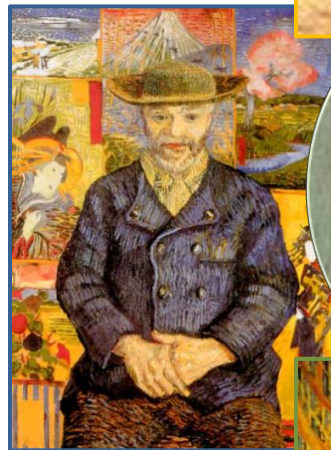
In 1885 (32) he completed what is considered his first major work, *The Potato Eaters*, the product of years painting peasant character studies. He painted still-life paintings, mainly in somber earth tones. When he complained that Theo wasn't making much effort to sell his paintings in Paris, his brother wrote that the works were too dark. The current style was bright Impressionist paintings.

He had little money and ate poorly, preferring to spend the money Theo sent on painting materials and models. Bread, coffee and tobacco were his diet. He wrote he could only remember eating six hot meals since May of the previous year. His teeth became loose and painful. Van Gogh began to drink absinthe heavily. He became ill - run down by overwork, a poor diet and excessive smoking.

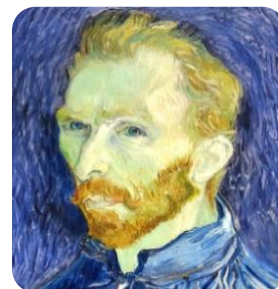
Van Gogh painted himself 37 times from 1886-89. *Self-portrait Without Beard*, 1889 (36), was the fourth most expensive painting ever sold, selling for \$71.5 million in 1998. It was his last self-portrait, a birthday gift to his mother.

In 1886 (33), he moved into Theo's Montmartre apartment in Paris and began learning at Cormon's studio. There he met Émile Bernard, Louis Anquetin, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The group congregated at Tanguy's paint store where Paul Cézanne's paintings were displayed. Theo's gallery had Impressionist works by Claude Monet, Alfred Sisley, Edgar Degas and Camille Pissarro for Vincent's viewing. Little is known about his stay in Paris because the brothers had no need to write letters. He collected and decorated his studio with hundreds of Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock prints and they are visible in the backgrounds of several of Van Gogh's paintings.

*The Potato Eaters*, 1885 (32). *Still Life with Clogs and pots*, 1884 (31). *Still Life with Yellow Straw Hat*, 1881-85 (28 - 32). *Pair of Shoes*, 1888 (35). *Still Life with Absinthe*, 1887 (34). *Self-portrait without Beard*, 1889 (36). *Courtesan (after Eisen)*, 1887 (34). *Self-portrait*, 1889 (36).



Portrait of Père Tanguy, 1887



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Conflicts arose and Theo found living with Vincent "almost unbearable." Van Gogh moved and became acquainted with Paul **Signac**. With Émile **Bernard** he adopted elements of **pointillism**, a technique of applying a multitude of small colored dots that, when seen from a distance, create an optical blend of hues. The style stresses the value of complementary colors to form vibrant contrasts.

In 1887 (34), Theo and Vincent befriended Paul **Gauguin** who had arrived in Paris. Vincent arranged an exhibition. Finally, feeling worn out from life in Paris, he left. He'd painted over 200 works during his two years living in the city.



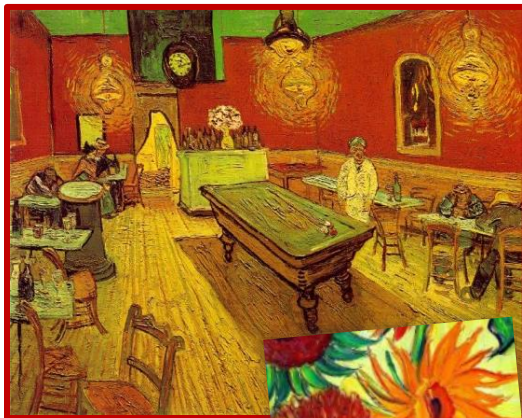
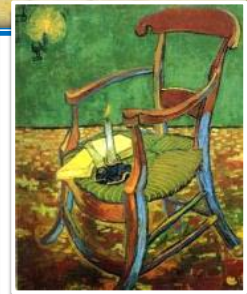
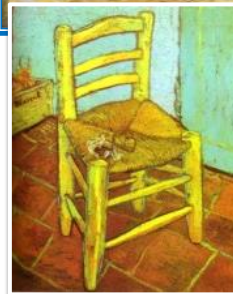
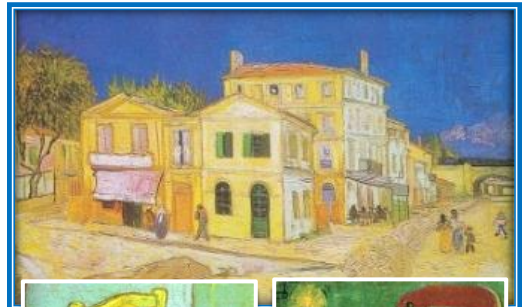
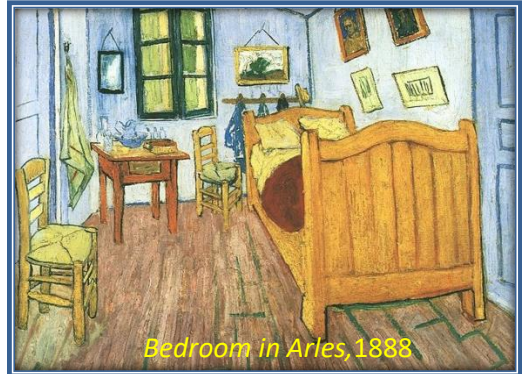
Van Gogh moved to Arles in 1888 (35). He was ill from drinking and suffering from smoker's cough. Jeanne Calment - who at 13 served in the fabric shop where van Gogh went to buy some canvas - remembered him as "dirty, badly dressed and disagreeable," and "very ugly, ungracious, impolite, sick."

Van Gogh was enchanted by Southern France. In the vivid Mediterranean climate and light, his work grew brighter, and he developed his unique and highly recognizable style.

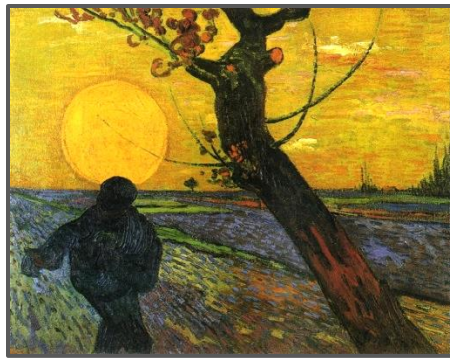
He leased a portion of the Yellow House at No. 2 Place Lamartine. Lacking furnishings to live there, Van Gogh utilized it as a studio. He created a series of paintings intended to decorate the Yellow House. Van Gogh wrote about *The Night Café*: "I have

tried to express the idea that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad, or commit a crime."

When a reluctant Gauguin agreed to visit Arles, Van Gogh hoped for friendship and for his idea of a collective of artists. In anticipation he bought two beds. Gauguin arrived and they painted together.



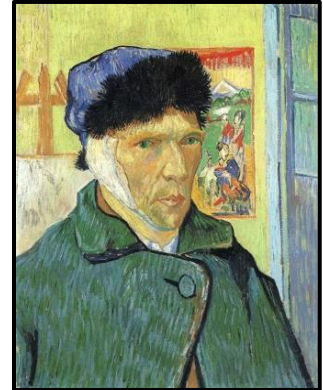
*Skull with Burning Cigarette, 1885. 1888 (35): The Yellow House, Café Terrace at Night, Van Gogh's Chair, Gauguin's Armchair, The Night Café, Starry Night Over the Rhone, Flowers, Vase with Twelve Sunflowers. By Gauguin - The Painter of Sunflowers: Portrait of Vincent Van Gogh, 1888. labELbrass.com*



Their relationship began to deteriorate and they quarreled. Van Gogh feared that Gauguin was going to desert him. On 23 December 1888 (35), Van Gogh came at Gauguin with a razor blade, but in panic, fled. He cut his own left ear lobe and was taken to a hospital. He asked for Gauguin continually, but Gauguin left Arles and never saw Van Gogh again. Theo came to Vincent's aid, notified by Gauguin.

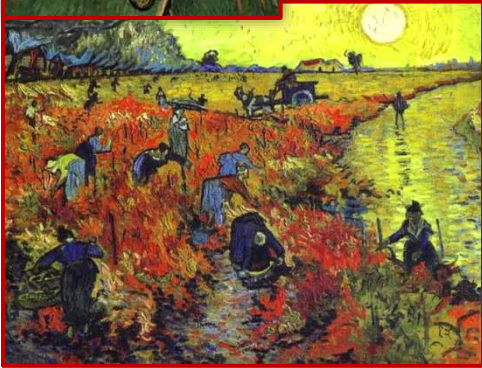


Van Gogh spent the next month between hospital and home, suffering from hallucinations and delusions of being poisoned. After receiving a petition from 30 townspeople who called him "fou roux" (*the redheaded madman*), the police closed his house. He moved, after floods damaged some paintings.



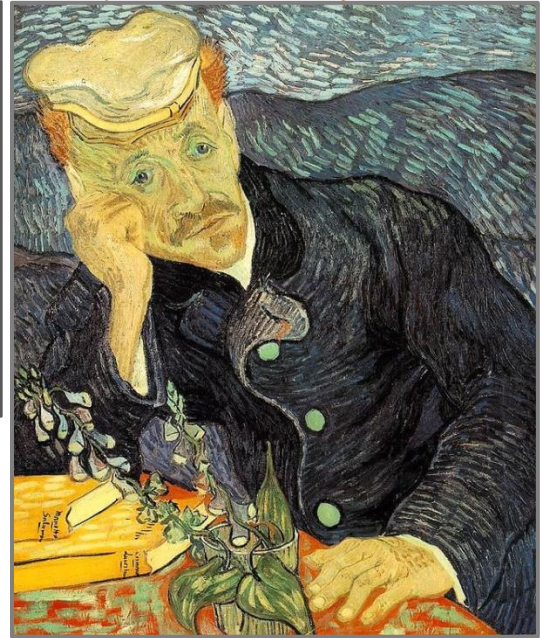
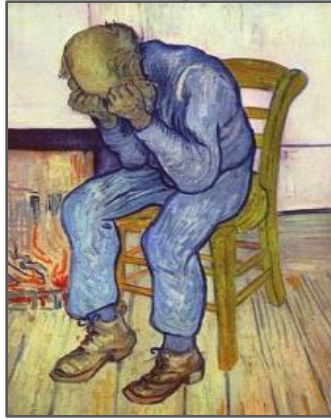
He committed himself to an asylum two months later. The area had cornfields, vineyards, cypress and olive trees. Theo arranged for two adjoining cells with barred windows, one for a studio for Van Gogh.

The clinic and its garden became the his main subjects. Some of this period's work is characterized by swirls, including one of his best-known, *The Starry Night*.



1888 (35): Joseph Roulin (*The Postman*), Sower with Setting Sun. 1889 (36): Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear, Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe. *The Red Vineyard*, 1888 (35). 1889 (36): *The Starry Night*, *Wheat Field with Cypresses*, *Iris*.

1890 (37): *Road with Cypress and Star, Sorrowing Old Man ('At Eternity's Gate'), Portrait of Dr. Gachet.*



In 1890 (37), Van Gogh left the clinic to move nearer Theo and the physician Dr. Paul Gachet. Gachet had treated several artists,

was recommended by Camille **Pissarro** and was also an amateur artist. Van Gogh's first impression was that Gachet was "...sicker than I am, I think, or shall we say just as much." He did a series of portraits of Gachet emphasizing his melancholic disposition. In 1990, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* fetched a record price of \$82.5 million, the highest price paid for a piece of art at public auction.



Detail of *Wheatfield with Crows* (see below), 1890.

Referring to his paintings of troubled skies, he said: "I did not have to go out of my way very much in order to try to express sadness and extreme loneliness." Yet, in the same paragraph he writes: "... these canvases will tell you what I cannot say in words, ... how healthy and invigorating I find the countryside".

In July 1890, Van Gogh is believed to have shot himself in the chest with a revolver. No gun was ever found and there were no witnesses. He was able to walk back home. He was attended by two physicians, neither able to perform surgery to remove the bullet. They left him alone in his room, smoking his pipe. The following morning, when he was notified, Theo rushed to be with Vincent. Within hours, Vincent began to fail, the result of infection in the wound. Vincent died that evening. Theo reported his last words as "The sadness will last forever." Theo died shortly after Vincent's death.

## What Do You Remember?

1. Even though Van Gogh was a prolific painter, creating over \_\_\_\_\_ pieces of art in his last \_\_\_\_\_ years, he only sold one painting during his lifetime. It was called \_\_\_\_\_ and sold for \$ \_\_\_\_\_. Today, one Van Gogh painting can sell for \_\_\_\_\_ of \$.
2. Another artist who lived with Vincent for part of his life, and who he had some disagreeable times with was \_\_\_\_\_. They lived in a \_\_\_\_\_ and to decorate it for his housemate's arrival Vincent painted and hung up pictures of \_\_\_\_\_ (type of flower).
3. Van Gogh was a prolific self-portraitist, painting himself \_\_\_\_\_ times in three years. Most of the paintings show his head from the side opposite his mutilated \_\_\_\_\_.
4. In 1990, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of Van Gogh painting) became the most expensive painting ever sold when it was bought by a Japanese businessman for \$ \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What do you know of Vincent's spiritual journey? \_\_\_\_\_

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## What

## Historical Timeline

## Who

1844 – Morse’s **telegraph** used for first time  
1851, 52 – **Sewing machine, Elevator**  
1857 – **Germ theory** of disease  
1859 - 64 – **Steamroller, Pasteurization**  
1867 – Nobel invents **dynamite**  
1875 – **Bell** invents **telephone**  
1880 – **Edison’s** electric **light**

1804 – 1849 – Johann **Strauss**  
1833 – 1897 – Johannes **Brahms**  
1833 – 1896 – Alfred **Nobel**  
1856 – 1939 – Sigmund **Freud**  
1879 – 1955 – Albert **Einstein**  
1879 – 1953 – Joseph **Stalin**  
1882 – 1945 – F.D. **Roosevelt**

## Quiz Answers:

1. 2100, 10, 1, The Red Vineyard, \$80, millions.
2. Paul Gauguin, yellow house, sunflowers.
3. 37, right, ear.
4. Portrait of Dr. Gachet, \$82.5 million.
5. From Wikipedia: Van Gogh's religious zeal grew until he felt he had found his true vocation. To support his effort to become a pastor, his family sent him to Amsterdam to study theology in May 1877, where he prepared for the entrance exam with his uncle Johannes Stricker; a respected theologian who published the first "Life of Jesus" in the Netherlands. Van Gogh failed the exam, and left his uncle Jan's house in July 1878. He then undertook, but failed, a three-month course at a Protestant missionary school in

Laeken, near Brussels. In January 1879, he took a temporary post as a missionary in the village of Petit Wasmes in the coal-mining district of Borinage in Belgium. Taking Christianity to what he saw as its logical conclusion, van Gogh lived like those he preached to, sleeping on straw in a small hut at the back of the baker's house where he was staying. The baker's wife reported **hearing van Gogh sobbing at night in the hut. His choice of squalid living conditions did not endear** him to the appalled church authorities, who dismissed him for "undermining the dignity of the priesthood."

From [geheugenvannederland.nl](http://geheugenvannederland.nl):  
interested in the Bible.

“a few years which when I was confused mysticism.” [letter 432].  
in Van Gogh’s life.  
youthful period of and he rejected the French author Michelet statement to Victor Hugo):

From 23 -27, Van Gogh was exceptionally  
He later described this period as  
I find hard to understand myself,  
by religious ideas – by a sort of  
Faith played an important role  
This was true even after his religious fanaticism ended church. He quoted the (though he attributed the “Religions pass, but God remains.” [letter 294]

Landscape with House and Ploughman, 1889 (36)

Two Peasant Women Digging in a Snow-Covered Field at Sunset, 1890 (37).

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