

Van Gogh

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Self-Portrait, Saint-Rémy, late August 1889

Oil on canvas, 57 x 43.5 cm

Private Collection, New York

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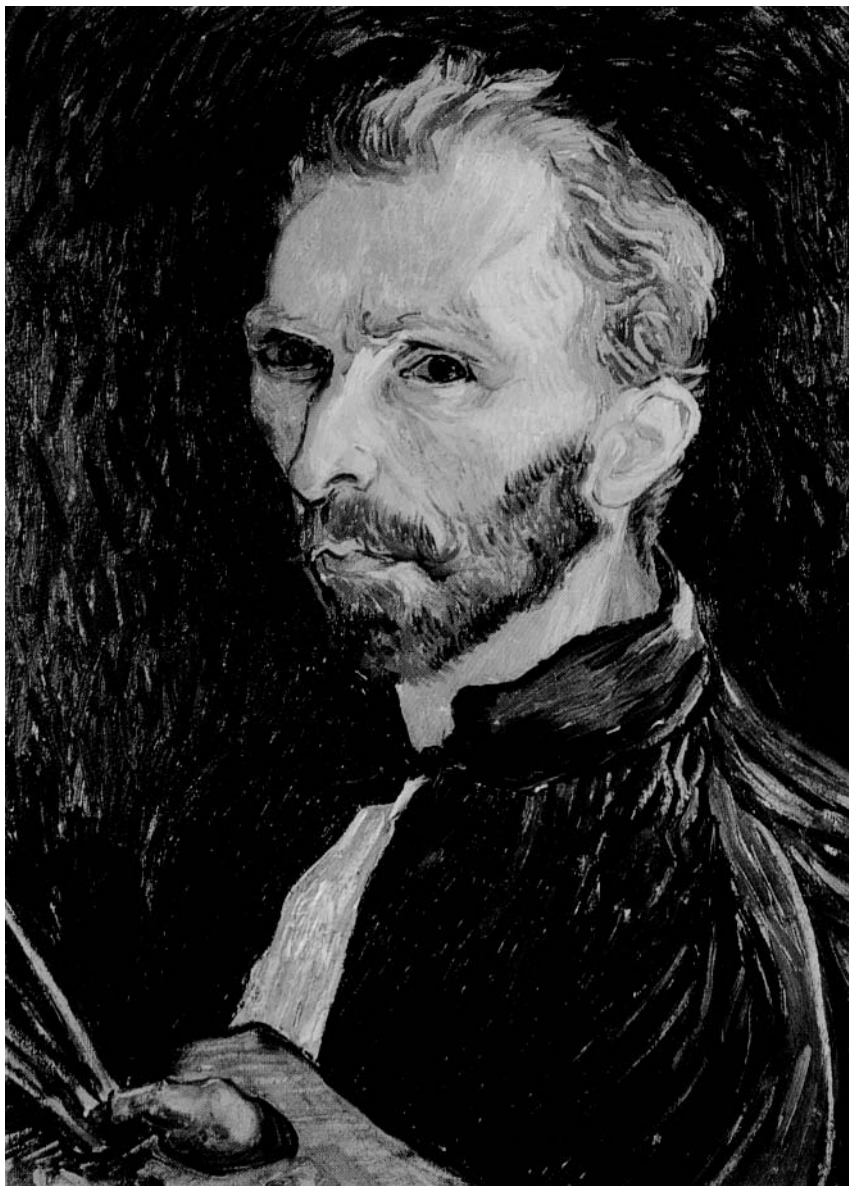
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“It is not the language of painters but the language of nature which one should listen to, the feeling for the things themselves, for reality is more important than the feeling for pictures.”

– Vincent Van Gogh



Biography

- 1853 Vincent Van Gogh is born on March the 30th at Groot Zunder, in the south of Holland, not far from the Belgian border. Son of the pastor Théodotus Van Gogh and Anna Van Gogh-Carventus, he is the oldest of the family's six children. He is given the name of his brother who had been born dead exactly on the same day a year before.
- 1857 His brother Théodorus is born on the 1st of May. Van Gogh was particularly close throughout his life with Théodorus, and the two maintained a long correspondence.
- 1869 He is hired by his uncle in the Goupil and Co. gallery in the Hague and becomes acquainted with 20th century English art, with the works of the Barbizon school, as well as with 17th century Flemish painting (particularly with Rembrandt).
- 1872 This year marks the beginning of the correspondence with his brother Theo, which lasted throughout their lives.
- 1873 He joins the London branch of Goupil. At London he suffered his first deceptive encounter with love in the face of Ursula, his landlady's daughter, who rejected him.
- 1874 In October, he is sent to the centre of the Goupil gallery in Paris, where he lives isolated and devotes himself to the study of the Bible.
- 1876 He is dismissed from the Goupil's for negligence and returns to England, where he works as a teacher and then as a vicar's assistant.
- 1877 Van Gogh returns to Amsterdam to prepare himself for entering the Theology Faculty.
- 1878 After having abandoned his entry to the Theology faculty, he fails to become a vicar.
- 1879 By order of the Evangelical Church of Brussels, Van Gogh finally gains permission to work as a pastor for six months at Wasmé. But his contract is not prolonged because of his almost fanatical zeal. He falls into a depression and severs all ties with his family for nine months.
- 1880 After many failures, Van Gogh begins his artistic career. He goes to Brussels, studies anatomy and perspective and works in the studio of the Dutch painter van Rappard.

The Hague period 1881-1883:

- 1881 He returns to his parents' home in Etten and improves his design. But he falls in love with his cousin Kee Vos-Stricker, who rejects him violently, and he falls once more into a depression. At the end of this year he goes to the Hague and enters the studio of Anton Mauve. Mauve soon dismisses him because of his unstable behaviour. Even though he lives off the allowance sent to him monthly by his brother Théo, Van Gogh takes under his wing Clasina Maria Hornik, also known as Sien, a pregnant prostitute abandoned with her five-year-old child.
- 1882 A short period of optimism and continuous work is followed by yet another depression, when Sien leaves him. Still, during his Hague period, Van Gogh created almost 200 designs (60 in pencil and 30 in watercolor), mostly Dutch landscapes and portraits of Sien.

Vincent

The Nuenen period 1883-1885:

- 1883 After a time of solitude and depression, he decides to return to his parents who are now living in Nuenen. He sets up his studio in the laundry.
- 1884 Margot Beggeman and Vincent Van Gogh meet and decide to marry. Their parents' opposition to this marriage drives Margot to suicide. Van Gogh saves her at the last minute but is profoundly shocked. At that time he gives courses to some amateur artists.
- 1885 His father dies abruptly from a heart attack. His work begins being appreciated in Paris. In November he leaves Nuenen for Anvers. This period is one of the most prolific ones, and he paints one of his masterpieces *The Potato Eaters*, showing the humility, hard work and poverty of the farmers. He discovers the art of Rubens, his palette becomes lighter and he starts using the flat colours after having seen the Japanese prints.

The Paris period 1886-1888:

He moves with his brother Théo to Paris. The artist frequents the art gallery of Julien Tanguy (often called the Brother Tanguy). But from 1887 Vincent's brother is increasingly worried by his irritability. Under the influence of the impressionists (notably Monet, Sisley and Renoir), the palette becomes lighter. He becomes friends with the painter Pissarro.

The Arles period 1888-1890:

- 1888 Van Gogh moves to Arles. He is stimulated by the blazing sun and the brilliance of the Provence colours. He will make more than two hundred paintings in two years. From May he is staying in the "Yellow House". Gauguin joins him in October but their differences and disputes in matters of art set them apart and their relations deteriorate. In December, after a violent dispute with Gauguin, Van Gogh cuts off his ear lobe, wraps it in newspaper and trusts it to a prostitute called Rachel. He is hospitalised, and Gauguin leaves horrified.
- 1889 Suffering from fits of madness, Van Gogh enters voluntarily the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, where he will stay for a year. Even though interrupted with depression crises, this period was a very important one for the art of Van Gogh from an artistic point of view. He creates some of his masterpieces, but also landscapes and olive trees.
- 1890 Van Gogh participates in the Salon of Independent artists in Paris with ten works. He moves to Auvers-sur-Oise and is treated by the doctor Gachet who is also an amateur painter. He feels a burden to his brother and his behaviour becomes once more troublesome. On July 27th Van Gogh shoots himself in the chest, and dies on the morning of the 29th with Théo by his side.



Vincent Van Gogh's life and work are so intertwined that it is hardly possible to see his pictures without reading in them the story of his life: a life which has been described so many times that it is by now the stuff of legend. Van Gogh is the incarnation of the suffering, misunderstood martyr of modern art, the emblem of the artist as an outsider.

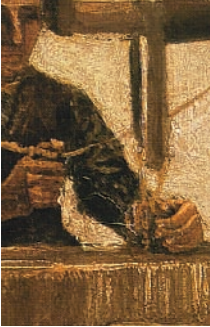
Beach at Scheveningen

The Hague: August 1882

Oil on canvas, 34.5 x 51 cm

Amsterdam, Vincent Van Gogh Foundation





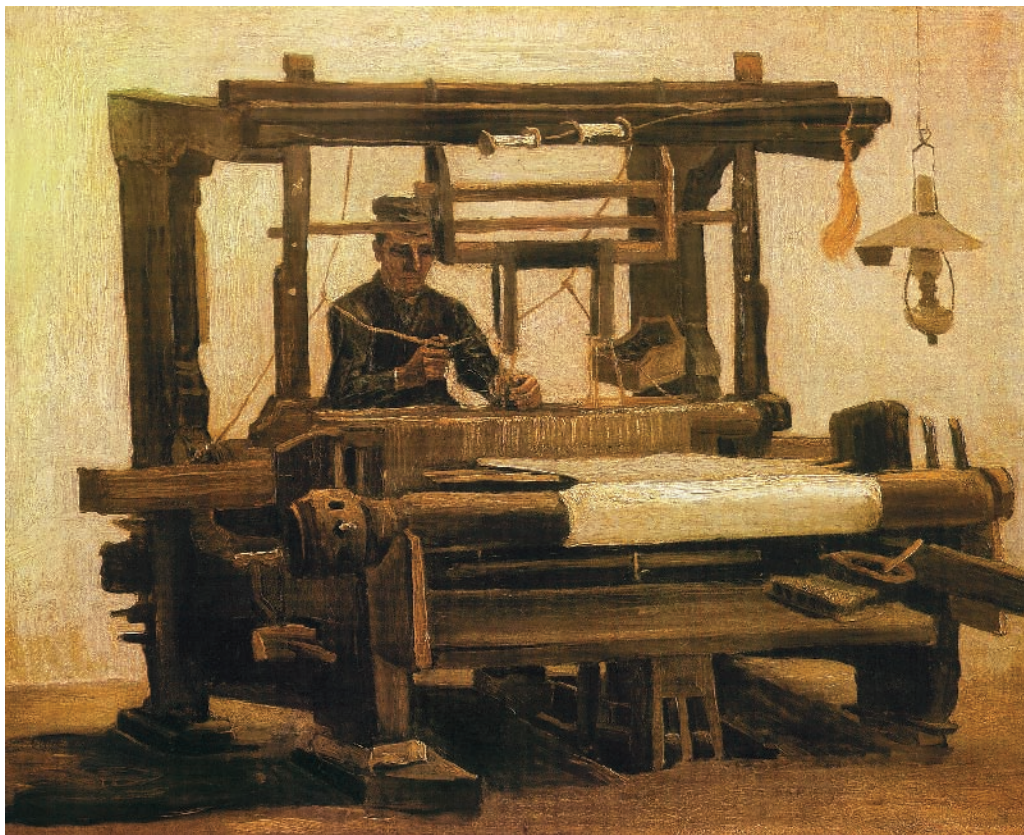
It became apparent early on that the events of Van Gogh's life would play a major role in the reception of his works. The first article about the painter was published in January, 1890 in the *Mercure de France*. The author of the article, Albert Aurier, was in contact with a friend of Van Gogh's named Emile Bernard, from whom he learned the details of Van Gogh's illness.

Weaver, Seen from the front

Nuenen: May 1884

Oil on canvas, 70 x 85 cm

Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum





At the time, Van Gogh was living in a mental hospital in Saint-Rémy, near Arles. The year before, he had cut off a piece of his right ear. Without explicitly revealing these facts from the artist's life, Aurier nevertheless introduced his knowledge of the apparent insanity of the painter into his discussion of the paintings themselves. Thus, for example, he uses terms like "obsessive passion" and "persistent preoccupation."

Head of a Peasant

Nuenen: January 1885
Oil on canvas, 47 x 30 cm
Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum





Van Gogh seems to him a “terrible and demented genius, often sublime, sometimes grotesque, always on the brink of the pathological.” Aurier regards the painter as a “Messiah [...] who would regenerate the decrepitude of our art and perhaps of our imbecile and industrialist society.”

The Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in the Snow

Nuenen: January 1885

Oil on canvas, 53 x 78 cm

Los Angeles, The Armand Hammer Museum of Art





With this characterization of the artist as a mad genius, the critic lay the foundation for the Van Gogh myth which began to emerge shortly after the death of the painter. After all, Aurier didn't believe that Van Gogh would ever be understood by the general public. A few days after Van Gogh's funeral in Auvers-sur-Oise, Dr. Gachet, who looked after the painter at the end of his life, wrote to Van Gogh's brother Theo:

The Potato Eaters

Nuenen: April 1885

Oil on canvas, 81.5 x 114.5 cm

Amsterdam, Vincent Van Gogh Foundation





“This sovereign contempt for life, doubtless a result of his impetuous love of art, is extraordinary. [...] If Vincent were still alive, it would take years and years until the human art triumphed. His death, however, is, so to speak, the glorious result of the fight between two opposed principles: light and darkness, life and death.”



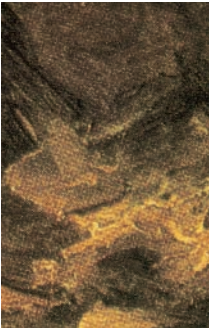
Cottage with Decrepit Barn and Stooping Woman

Nuenen: July 1885

Oil on canvas, 62 x 113 cm

Private Collection (sold, Sotheby's, London, 3.12.1985)





In his letters, nearly seven hundred of which have been published, he often writes about his desire for love and safety: "I should like to be with a woman for a change, I cannot live without love, without a woman." Van Gogh's rather bourgeois dreams of hearth and home never finally materialized. His first love, Ursula Loyer, married someone else.

Peasant Woman Digging

Neunen: August 1885
Oil on canvas, 42 x 32 cm
Birmingham, Barber Institute of Fine Arts
University of Birmingham





His cousin Kee, already a mother and widow, refused him partly for material reasons: Van Gogh was unable to care for her and her child. He tried to build up a family life with a prostitute named Sien. He finally left her because his brother Theo, on whom he depended financially, wanted him to end the relationship. Van Gogh's relationship with the twenty-one-year-old Marguerite Gachet is only known by rumor.

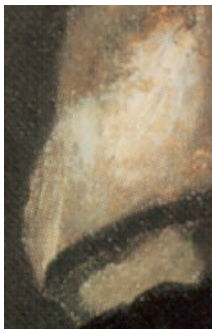
Still Life with a Basket of Vegetables

Nuenen: September 1885

Oil on canvas, 35.5 x 45 cm

Germany, Collection Anneliese Brand, Landsberg/Lech





Van Gogh not only sought the love of women, but also that of his family and friends, although he never achieved it in the measure he would have wished. Several days before his suicide, he summed up his lifelong failure to find a satisfying intimacy in the following enigmatic remark: "As through a looking glass, by a dark reason – so it has remained."

Peasant Woman, Seated with White Cap

Nuenen: December 1884
Oil on canvas, 36 x 26 cm
Private Collection





The pastor's son had taken his analogy from "The excellencies of love" in the first epistle to the Corinthians: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

This longing for a place in the community and the struggle for renown are two themes which can be traced throughout Van Gogh's life.



Portrait of Woman in Blue

Antwerp: December 1885

Oil on canvas, 46 x 38.5 cm

Amsterdam, Vincent Van Gogh Foundation