

# Vincent Van Gogh

(1853 - 1890)

Van Gogh's biography is intimately intertwined with his work. One of the greatest artists of the modern era, the pain and suffering of his life is evident in the magnificent body of work he left behind.

Born in 1853 in the Dutch town of Brabant, Van Gogh was an unhappy child with a difficult temperament who never got along with his parents, particularly his pastor father. At the age of sixteen, Van Gogh took a job as a salesman in a picture gallery in The Hague. His interest in painting was born at this time.

In 1873, the gallery sent Van Gogh to London, where he was rejected by his first love. He traveled between London and Paris until he was fired from the gallery in 1876. He then pursued a string of jobs at which he had little success. He took consolation in drawing.

In 1880, Van Gogh studied drawing seriously in Brussels and Etten. At this time, he was again rejected in love; his despair translated into his work. He lived in The Hague and studied with Mauve until 1883, when he left following several arguments with the artist. Artistically, Van Gogh's time in The Hague is extremely important. He worked unceasingly and created his first paintings and lithographs.

Van Gogh returned to Brabant, where his work focused on the poor and destitute. Van Gogh felt extreme compassion for the peasant population and this translated into his work. Although he lacked the technical ability of contemporary Dutch artists, he exceeded them in his honesty and perceptiveness. The Dutch period from 1881-85 is often referred to as the artist's 'dark period'. The Potato Eaters may be the best known and most representative work of this period.

Van Gogh studied for three months at the Academy in Antwerp in 1885-86. He then traveled to Paris in order to be close to his brother and confidante, Theo. In Paris, Van Gogh was influenced by the light and color of the Impressionists as well as Japanese art. He focused less on the moral themes of his previous works and began to paint outdoor scenes at Montmartre, views of the Seine, and still-lives.

In 1888, Van Gogh moved to Arles where he would begin the most productive period of his career. In approximately two years, he produced two hundred paintings and over a hundred drawings. During this time, he painted some of his most loved works, including Night Cafe, The Sower and Starry Night. His battle with mental illness was prominent and he

experienced several breakdowns in Arles which resulted in voluntary and involuntary stays in mental asylums. Despite these struggles, Van Gogh was amazed by the light and beauty of Arles and encouraged other artists to come. Gauguin lived with Van Gogh for several months, but the relationship was stormy and ended badly. The two artists had an infamous argument which resulted in Van Gogh's cutting off a piece of his ear and delivering it to a nearby brothel.

Van Gogh spent the last two months of his life in Auvers, near Paris. Here, he was cared for by Dr. Gachet, the subject of one of his portraits and a close friend. Van Gogh was prolific in Auvers; he produced seventy-five paintings before he ended his own life by shooting himself in a wheat field at the age of thirty-seven.

Van Gogh's work was almost entirely unknown in his own life. Soon after his death, his paintings began to attract attention and in the twentieth century he became recognized as one of the greatest artists of all time. Van Gogh's unique gift was his ability to transmit his emotions into his art; it is perhaps the emotional quality of his work which continues to resonate with generations of viewers.

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