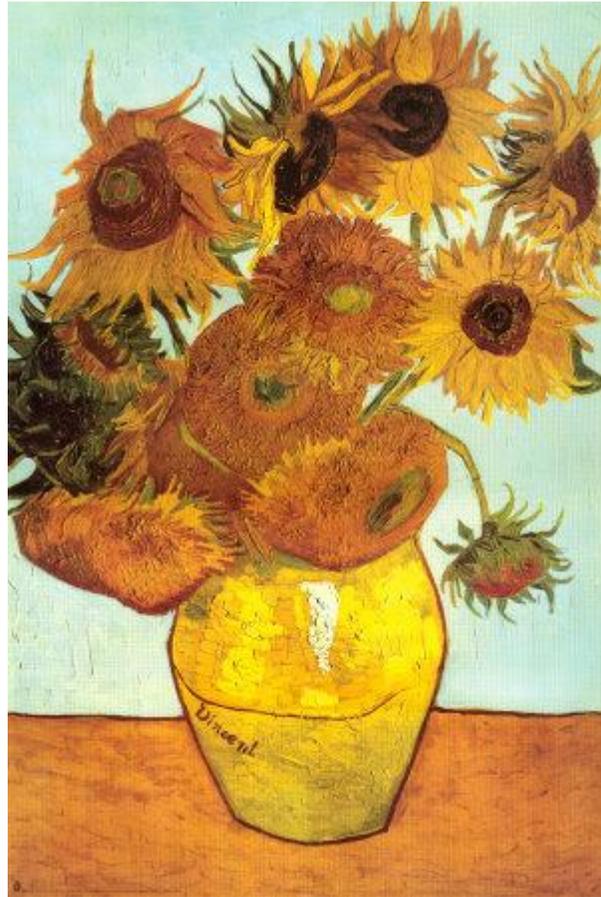


While Vincent van Gogh lamented his inability to pay human models, his financial dire straits harbored a bright side: it prompted the artist to seek other themes, of which he found plenty — and for free — in nature. Thus, a series of still life paintings featuring sunflowers came from under the artist’s brush. Though there are common elements shared between them, each piece carries unique characteristics that set it apart from the rest.



Sunflowers, c.1888

Vincent Van Gogh

The painting above combines attractive and unattractive qualities, celebrating nature in its most vibrant and unadorned. Uncompromising rendering presents fading, worn blossoms, some of which lost their plumage altogether, corpses of what used to be flowers. The result is not pretty, at least not in the conventional sense.

The top few blooms brim with life, and betray a subtext of “surprise” — of astonishment at the unusual situation of being torn away from the ground and placed into a foreign object.



Sunflowers, c.1888

Vincent van Gogh

Van Gogh is very meticulous in handling the details, conveying deformity, and providing almost every possible unflattering angle. Most of the blossoms appear to be in various stages of decay; some have only begun to droop, others are completely broken. One head already lost its color, others are on the way, having lost all of their petals. Differences in value expound these metamorphoses: the darker the yellow, the closer the sunflower is to total withering.

There are pieces of artwork drifting through galleries around the world that have become nearly synonymous with the artists name and techniques. The various paintings of Sunflowers and Vincent van Gogh are a perfect example of this. Not only can one make a mental connection between the artists name and painting but also between the artist and their influence on the development of art through these paintings. Vincent van Gogh's Sunflower paintings have been duplicated many times by various artists (although never reaching the vivacity and intensity of Van Gogh's) and displayed everywhere; from households to art expos.

Upon looking at these paintings one begins to notice aspects that seem to flow from one piece to another. The colors are vibrant and express emotions typically associated with the life of sunflowers: bright yellows of the full bloom to arid browns of wilting and death; all of the stages woven through these polar opposites are presented. Perhaps this very technique is what draws one into the painting; the fulfillment of seeing all angles of the spectrum of life and in turn reaching a deeper understanding of how all living things are tied together.

There are many pieces within this series of paintings (each is clearly identifiable as a Van Gogh work) in which there are only minor differences that separate them. The overall layout of the painting along with positioning of the actual sunflowers usually remains the same in the similar paintings. Below you can see highlighted areas of difference between two similar sunflower paintings.

Although Van Gogh's sunflower paintings are very similar in many aspects, each stands out as its own unique work of art. Van Gogh began painting sunflowers after he left Holland for France in pursuit of creating an artistic community. The firsts were created to decorate his friend Paul Gauguin's bedroom. The majority of Van Gogh's sunflowers in vases were created in Arles, France during 1888-1889. Van Gogh did create some sunflower paintings prior to this time though in Paris, France around the time of 1887. This series consists of sunflower clippings verses sunflowers in vases.

"These series of paintings were made possible by the innovations in manufactured pigments in the 19th Century. Without the vibrancy of the new colors, such as chrome yellow, Van Gogh may never have achieved the intensity of Sunflowers."

Regardless, Van Gogh's paintings of sunflowers have altered mankind's perspective of art and life. These paintings captivate the mind and leave you astounded in their simplistic beauty. The flowing wilted stems and the burst of lovely yellow draws ones attention around the painting, without disrupting the balance of the piece. These paintings are often duplicated but never reach the pure power of Van Gogh's.

Source(s):<http://www.vangoghgallery.com/painting/sunflowerindex.html>