

# VAN GOGH

(1853–1890)

**Vincent van Gogh is perhaps one of the most recognizable artists of all time.** His paintings remain, even more than 100 years after their creation, some of the most inventive, expressive, colorful works in history. As a leader of Post-Impressionism, Van Gogh’s original and honest interpretations of life introduced a new artistic language, one that would have far-reaching influence on such movements as Expressionism, Fauvism, and Modernism.

Although Van Gogh began drawing as a child, he did not make a full commitment to art until he was 27. One can observe in his early drawings only average ability, but it is staggering to see how quickly his skills and understanding improved. This was due to Van Gogh’s relentless drive—he would sometimes draw and paint for days on end, often forgoing eating and sleeping. We of course now know that his time on earth was short, and that he would only have 10 years to make his mark. His internal race

against the clock undoubtedly fueled his near obsessive devotion, as well as his meteoric rise to greatness.

Van Gogh certainly suffered for his art, and for his sanity. In reading his letters—especially those to his beloved brother and dealer Theo, who he felt was the only person who truly understood him—one sees that Van Gogh’s acute visual sensitivity drove him into almost daily sensory overload and that his overflowing heart and mind could never fully find rest. He dealt with overwhelming bouts of anxiety and mental illness, and sought solace in optimistic observations and feelings expressed in his art. One of his most iconic paintings, *The Starry, Starry Night*, captures a concept that continually captivated the artist: the idea of light in the dark. He was fascinated by its spiritual and psychological implications, in particular light’s ability to drive out darkness.

Toward the end of his life, Van Gogh forged a close, albeit tumultuous, friendship with the painter

Gauguin, who visited him in Arles and lived and painted with him for several months. The two fought heatedly about art, and one argument in particular precipitated Van Gogh’s infamous cutting of his

ear. This would be one of several irrational acts the artist would commit over the next few years, leading up to shooting himself in the chest at the age of 37. He died a day later, with his heartbroken

brother Theo by his side. Theo reported the artist’s last words as “The sadness will last forever.”

Vincent van Gogh was a sensitive artistic soul unlike any other in history. His prolific output, in

particular the work he created in the last five years of his life, has garnered for him the acceptance and accolades he so desperately wanted in his lifetime but was unable to achieve. —A.M.



**The Starry, Starry Night**  
1889, oil,  
29 x 36½".  
Collection The  
Museum of  
Modern Art,  
New York,  
New York.