

Содержание:

Image not found or type unknown



Introduction

Schoolboy, junior clerk at an art firm, teacher, bookseller, student and preacher: Vincent van Gogh was all of these before he decided at the age of 27 to become an artist. That decision would change the history of art forever.

Young Vincent 1853-1873

Vincent van Gogh was born in the Brabant village of Zundert on 30 March 1853. He was not the first child of the Protestant minister Theodorus van Gogh and Anna Carbentus: another son (also named Vincent) had been stillborn on the same date, precisely one year earlier.

Happily, the birth of the second Vincent went smoothly, and was followed by that of three sisters and two brothers: Anna, Theo, Wil, Lies and Cor. The Van Gogh family went on frequent walks in the area around Zundert, helping to instil a great love of nature in the future artist.

At the age of eleven, Vincent transferred from the village school in Zundert to a boarding school in Zevenbergen. He was deeply unhappy there, but managed to complete his elementary schooling. He drew from time to time, but there was little sign as yet of any special artistic talent.

When he was thirteen, Vincent went to secondary school in Tilburg, where he earned good marks, especially for languages. All the same, he quit the school half way through his second academic year (1867-68) for unknown reasons. Vincent never went back to school.

Vincent's uncle found the sixteen-year-old Van Gogh a job as a trainee at the international art dealer Goupil & Cie. He was taken on at the branch which 'Uncle Cent' (short for 'Vincent') had set up in The Hague. Vincent's earliest surviving letter dates

from these first years at Goupil.

September 1872 marked the beginning of a life-long correspondence between Vincent and his younger brother Theo, who started work for Goupil in 1873, this time in Brussels. Vincent was transferred that same year to Goupil's London branch.

Looking for a Direction 1873-1881

During his time in London, Vincent visited famous institutions like the British Museum and the National Gallery, where the works he admired included those by 'peasant painters' such as François Millet and Jules Breton. He also read everything from museum guides and magazines to literature and poetry.

Vincent was transferred to Paris in 1875 – a period in which he became increasingly religious. The letters he wrote to Theo at this time are full of Bible quotes and accounts of church services and sermons.

Despite his interest in art, Vincent was less and less enamoured with his job at the art firm. The feeling was mutual, and in 1876 Goupil dismissed him.

When I saw Mr Boussod again I asked if His Hon. indeed thought it a good thing for me to go on working in the firm this year, since His Hon. had never had any very serious complaints against me. The latter was indeed the case, though, and His Hon. took the words out of my mouth, so to speak, saying that I would leave on 1 April...'

Following his dismissal from Goupil, Vincent returned to England, where he worked as an unpaid assistant teacher at a boys' boarding school in Ramsgate. He later found a salaried position at a private school run by a vicar in Isleworth near London. He was allowed to preach at the school and in the surrounding villages, but the job offered very few prospects. Vincent spent Christmas 1876 with his parents in Brabant, where his father advised him not to return to England. Van Gogh decided to follow his advice.

Uncle Cent came to the rescue again, finding Vincent a job serving in a bookshop in Dordrecht, near Rotterdam, in January 1877. But he was becoming increasingly religious once again, and his parents were by now seriously worried – Vincent was already 24 and still had no clear purpose in life. A few months later, they agreed to his plan to study theology. Van Gogh had not finished school, however, so he first had to sit an entrance exam.

Vincent spent a year in Amsterdam, living with an uncle. Another uncle, who was a minister, helped him prepare for his theology entrance exam. All this family support came to nothing, however, as Vincent lacked the discipline to study. He preferred to wander around the city and take long walks in the surrounding countryside. After a while, his uncle the minister advised him to forget about his studies.

Despite abandoning his study plans, Vincent was still eager to serve God. He left Amsterdam to pursue a new mission in Belgium, where he worked as a lay preacher in the Borinage mining region. He taught, visited the sick and gave Bible readings.

'It's a sombre place, and at first sight everything around it has something dismal and deathly about it. The workers there are usually people, emaciated and pale owing to fever, who look exhausted and haggard, weather-beaten and prematurely old, the women generally sallow and withered.'

Vincent lived among the miners and their families in the Borinage, sharing their poverty. He slept on the floor and gave away his possessions. His dedication was such that he was nicknamed 'The Christ of the Coal Mine'. Vincent nevertheless failed to establish a close-knit community of worshippers and his contract was not renewed.

Vincent often included little sketches in the letters he sent his brother Theo and sometimes enclosed a drawing of what he had seen. This eventually led to a turning point in his life, when Theo advised him to concentrate more on his drawing. Vincent now became convinced that he could also serve God as an artist. He moved to Brussels in October 1880, where he began to work on his drawing technique and came into contact with other artists. He no longer had a paid job, so Theo sent him money from time to time.

'I heard from Pa that you've already been sending me money without my knowing it, and in doing so are effectively helping me to get along. For this accept my heartfelt thanks.'

First Steps as an Artist 1881-1883

In the spring of 1881, Vincent moved back in with his parents, who were now living in Etten, also in Brabant. He practised drawing and frequently worked out of doors. In the meantime, his brother Theo had been appointed manager of Goupil & Cie in Paris. He supported Vincent financially so he could focus entirely on his art.

Vincent's parents, by contrast, were extremely disappointed that their eldest son had chosen the life of an artist, which in their eyes was synonymous with social failure. It did not help that Vincent had fallen in love with his cousin, Kee Vos. Kee was a widow and wanted nothing to do with him, but Van Gogh persisted. This did not go down well with his family and, following a row with his father, Vincent walked out of his parents' house on Christmas Day 1881. He found a new home in The Hague.

'Pa cannot empathize or sympathize with me, and I cannot settle in to Pa and Ma's routine, it's too constricting for me — it would suffocate me.'

Vincent took painting lessons in The Hague from a cousin by marriage, the celebrated artist Anton Mauve. Van Gogh felt his drawing technique was not yet good enough, so he also continued to practise fanatically. An uncle gave him his first commission: twelve drawings of city views in The Hague. The series gave him the opportunity to develop his perspective skills. Mauve taught Vincent the basics of painting in watercolour and oils and Van Gogh visited his studio almost every day.

Vincent met Sien Hoornik in early 1882. She became both his model and his lover. Vincent's friends and family (including Mauve) were shocked, as Sien was a former prostitute. What's more, she was pregnant and already had a five-year-old daughter. Vincent felt sorry for Sien, though, and was determined to take care of her. They rented a studio in which she, the little girl and the new baby could all live as well. Theo did not approve of Vincent's choice, but continued to support him financially. Vincent remained stubborn, but eventually realized that his relationship with Sien was not working out the way he hoped, so he broke it off.

'I knew from the outset that her character is a ruined character, but I had hopes of her finding her feet and now, precisely when I don't see her any more and think about the things I saw in her, I increasingly come to realize that she was already too far gone to find her feet.'

Following his split with Sien, Vincent travelled to the countryside in Drenthe to draw and paint the heathland and moors. He thought the landscape beautiful and set to work in good spirits. Nevertheless, the province did not only bring him peace and inspiration:

'Drenthe is superb, but staying there depends on many things — depends on whether one has the money for it, depends on whether one can endure the loneliness.'

After less than three months, the rain, cold and isolation drove Vincent away from Drenthe to his parents' new home in the Brabant village of Nuenen.

Peasant Painter 1883-1885

Vincent moved back in with his parents in December 1883. He initially worked in a small studio at the back of the house, but after a few months, he rented a larger space elsewhere in the village.

Nuenen was an ideal setting for a 'peasant painter'. It was home to many farmers, rural labourers and weavers, who Vincent sketched and painted at every opportunity. He proposed in early 1884 that he should start giving Theo the works he produced in return for the allowance provided by his brother.

'Now I have a proposal to make for the future. Let me send you my work and you take what you want from it, but I insist that I may consider the money I would receive from you after March as money I've earned.'

The idea was that Theo would sell the paintings on the Paris art market, but the plan came to nothing: French tastes ran more to colour, and Vincent's work was distinctly dark in tone. This would change, but not for a while yet.

Vincent's parents found it hard to live with their eldest son, who refused to behave conventionally. Shortly after his father died in late March 1885, Van Gogh left the family home and moved into his studio, where he started work on *The Potato Eaters*.

Vincent combined his hard work on "that thing with the peasants around a dish of potatoes in the evening" with chain smoking and a poor diet. Most of his money went on artist's materials. Later that year, he decided to enrol at the academy of art in Antwerp and left the Netherlands, never to return.

Antwerp had plenty to offer Vincent: good materials, drawing clubs with models, and churches, museums and galleries stuffed with art. The drawing classes he took at the academy were, however, far too traditional for him.

'I actually find all the drawings I see there hopelessly bad — and fundamentally wrong. And I know that mine are totally different — time will just have to tell who's right. Damn it, not one of them has any feeling for what a classical statue is.'

He did not stay in the Flemish city for long. He arranged with Theo to come to Paris and take lessons in the studio of Fernand Cormon – an artist who was very popular with foreign students. Theo began to look for an apartment large enough for him and his

brother, but before he could find one, Vincent turned up in Paris unannounced at the end of February 1886.

'My dear Theo, Don't be cross with me that I've come all of a sudden. I've thought about it so much and I think we'll save time this way.'

From Dark to Light 1886-1888

Theo was the manager of Goupil art dealers (later Boussod, Valadon & Cie) on the Boulevard Montmartre in Paris. He introduced his brother to the colourful work of prominent modern artists like Claude Monet. Vincent van Gogh also got to know a new generation of artists at Fernand Cormon's studio, including Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Emile Bernard.

All those new impressions and new people had an influence on his own work and inspired him to experiment freely. The dark tones of *The Potato Eaters* quickly gave way to brighter colours, as in *The Hill of Montmartre with Stone Quarry*.

Vincent's work grew steadily brighter in Paris, under the influence of modern art. He used brighter colours and developed his own style of painting, with short brush strokes.

The themes he painted likewise changed, with rural labourers giving way to cafés and boulevards, the countryside along the Seine and floral still lifes. He also tried out more 'commercial' subjects, such as portraits. Vincent mostly acted as his own sitter, however, as models were relatively expensive.

Meanwhile, he discovered a new source of inspiration in Japanese woodcuts, which sold in large quantities in Paris. Vincent and Theo began to collect them. The influence of the bold outlines, cropping and colour contrasts in these prints showed through immediately in his own work.

After two years, Vincent began to tire of the frenetic city life in Paris.

'It seems to me almost impossible to be able to work in Paris, unless you have a refuge in which to recover and regain your peace of mind and self-composure. Without that, you'd be bound to get utterly numbed.'

He longed for the peace of the countryside, for sun, and for the light and colour of 'Japanese' landscapes, which he hoped to find in Provence, in the South of France.

Following a train journey that lasted a day and a night, he arrived on 20 February 1888 in Arles, a small town on the River Rhône.

South of France 1888-1889

Vincent was delighted with the bright light and colours in Arles, and set to work enthusiastically, painting orchards in blossom and workers gathering the harvest. He also made a trip to the coast, where he painted the boats.

His style became looser and more expressive. Vincent corresponded with Theo about his plan to set up a 'Studio of the South' in Arles for a group of artists whose work Theo could sell in Paris.

'You know I've always thought it ridiculous for painters to live alone &c. You always lose when you're isolated.'

With this 'artists' colony' in mind, Vincent rented four rooms in the 'Yellow House' on Place Lamartine. Paul Gauguin was the first - and, as it would turn out, the last - artist to move in with him.

Gauguin arrived in late October 1888, but only after considerable cajoling. Theo had to stump up his travel expenses, for instance, but he was glad to do so for Vincent's sake: 'So Gauguin's coming; that will make a big change in your life. I hope that your efforts will succeed in making your house a place where artists will feel at home.'

Van Gogh and Gauguin worked hard together and their collaboration resulted in some exceptional paintings. At the same time, however, the two men had very different views on art, which led to frequent, heated discussions: 'Gauguin and I talk a lot about Delacroix, Rembrandt &c. The discussion is excessively electric. We sometimes emerge from it with tired minds, like an electric battery after it's run down.'

Gauguin worked mainly from memory and his imagination, while Vincent preferred to paint what he could see in front of him. Their very different characters caused the tension between them to rise steadily.

Vincent began to display signs of agitation and when Gauguin threatened to leave, the pressure became too much. Van Gogh became so distraught that he threatened his friend with a razor. Later that evening, he sliced off his own ear at the Yellow House, wrapped it in newspaper and presented it to a prostitute in the nearby red-light district.

The morning after he cut off part of his ear, Vincent was admitted to the hospital in Arles. Theo rushed down on the train as soon as he heard the news: 'I found Vincent in the hospital in Arles. The people around him realized from his agitation that for the past few days he had been showing symptoms of that most dreadful illness, of madness, and an attack of fièvre chaude, when he injured himself with a knife, was the reason he was taken to hospital. Will he remain insane? The doctors think it possible, but daren't yet say for certain.'

Theo van Gogh to Jo Bonger, 28 December 1888

Theo returned to Paris immediately after visiting the hospital, accompanied by Gauguin. Vincent's dream of a shared studio had proved to be short-lived.

He remembered little about the ear incident and when he was discharged from the hospital in early January 1889, he resumed painting. In the months that followed, however, his mental health fluctuated sharply. Fearing a fresh bout of illness, he had himself voluntarily admitted to Saint-Paul-de-Mausole psychiatric hospital in Saint-Rémy in May.

Hospitalization 1889-1890

Once Vincent had recovered sufficiently at the clinic in Saint-Rémy, he began working again. On his good days, he often painted in the institution's walled garden and he was later allowed to work outside the hospital too.

He was also given an extra room inside the clinic to use as a studio, where he produced a series of works, including copies of prints after paintings by artists like Rembrandt and Millet.

Vincent's mental health continued to fluctuate. During one period of extreme confusion, he ate some of his oil paint, following which he was restricted to drawing for a while. Despite such relapses, however, Vincent was exceptionally productive at Saint-Rémy, where he completed around 150 paintings in the space of a year.

'As for me, my health is good, and as for the head it will, let's hope, be a matter of time and patience.'

Theo married Johanna ('Jo') Bonger in Amsterdam in April 1889. In January 1890, Vincent received a birth announcement in the mail at Saint-Rémy. Theo and Jo had named their

son after him: Vincent Willem van Gogh. Vincent sent them a special painting from the hospital: Almond Blossom.

'I'd much rather that he'd called his boy after Pa, whom I've thought about so often these days, than after me, but anyway, as it's been done now I started right away to make a painting for him, to hang in their bedroom. Large branches of white almond blossom against a blue sky.'

Six of Vincent's paintings were shown in Brussels in early 1890 at a group exhibition of the Belgian artists' association 'Les Vingt' ('The Twenty').

The art critic Albert Aurier had already published a positive article about Van Gogh's work and one of the exhibited paintings, The Red Vineyard, was sold during the show: Vincent's work was beginning to be appreciated. This was not the first time it had been shown, however: Theo had been submitting his paintings since 1888 to the annual 'Salon des Indépendants' in Paris. Ten of Vincent's works were selected for inclusion in March 1890, and the response was very positive: 'How pleased I would have been if you'd been there at the Independents' exhibition. [...] Your paintings are well placed and look very well. Many people came up to ask me to give you their compliments. Gauguin said that your paintings are the key to the exhibition.'

Vincent's final months 1890

Vincent left the mental hospital in Saint-Rémy in May 1890 and headed north to Auvers-sur-Oise, where several artists were already residing.

Auvers offered Vincent the peace and quiet he needed, while being close enough to Paris for him to visit his brother Theo. There was a doctor there too, Paul Gachet, who could keep an eye on him. Vincent quickly befriended Gachet, himself an amateur painter, who advised Van Gogh to devote himself completely to his art. He did precisely that, painting the gardens and wheatfields around the village at a feverish rate.

Vincent threw himself entirely into his painting in this period, completing virtually a work a day. His health seemed to be improving, too.

Vincent visited Theo and his family in Paris in early July 1890, where he learned that his brother was thinking of quitting his job at the art dealers' he had managed over many years.

Theo wanted to set up his own business, which inevitably represented a certain financial risk. Vincent returned to Auvers a worried man.

'Once back here I too still felt very saddened, and had continued to feel the storm that threatens you also weighing upon me. What can be done – you see I usually try to be quite good-humoured, but my life, too, is attacked at the very root, my step also is faltering. '

Both Theo and his wife Jo wrote to Vincent to reassure him. But financial uncertainty and fear that his nervous attacks might return took a heavy toll on Van Gogh's health. He could not shake off his gloom about the future.

'. . . knowing clearly what I wanted I've painted another three large canvases since then. They're immense stretches of wheatfields under turbulent skies, and I made a point of trying to express sadness, extreme loneliness. You'll see this soon, I hope – for I hope to bring them to you in Paris as soon as possible, since I'd almost believe that these canvases will tell you what I can't say in words, what I consider healthy and fortifying about the countryside.'

No matter how 'healthy and fortifying' Vincent found the countryside, it was to no avail. His illness and his uncertainty about the future became too much.

On 27 July 1890, he walked into a wheatfield and shot himself in the chest with a pistol. The wounded artist staggered back to his room at the Auberge Ravoux. Theo rushed from Paris to Auvers and was present when his brother died of his injuries on 29 July.

Vincent was buried at Auvers on 30 July 1890. His legacy was a large body of art works: over 850 paintings and almost 1,300 works on paper.

Conclusion

Six weeks after Vincent's death, Theo organized a memorial exhibition of his brother's work. His many exertions and setbacks meant his own health was now steadily deteriorating too. Shortly after the exhibition, he resigned from Boussod with immediate effect, and promptly suffered a severe nervous breakdown.

Theo was admitted to a clinic in Utrecht, suffering from syphilis-related physical and mental symptoms. He died there at the end of January 1891, barely half a year after his brother's death.

Vincent's paintings now came under the care of Theo's widow, Jo van Gogh-Bonger.

Following Theo's death, his widow Jo moved to the Dutch town of Bussum with her son Vincent Willem, taking Vincent and Theo's art collection with her. She remarried in 1901 to the painter Johan Cohen Gosschalk, and the family moved to Amsterdam two years later.

Jo sought to raise public awareness of Vincent's paintings in various ways, including exhibition loans to museums all over the world. More and more buyers emerged for Van Gogh's work.

In 1914, Jo published the first edition of Vincent's letters to Theo, and that same year she had Theo reinterred in Auvers-sur-Oise, in a grave alongside his brother's.

Following Jo's death in 1925 Vincent and Theo's art collection passed to her son, the engineer Vincent Willem van Gogh, who loaned his uncle's paintings to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1930.

As Vincent's fame grew, however, there were calls for the collection to be placed in a dedicated museum.

In 1962, with the consent of the State of the Netherlands, 'the Engineer' transferred the Van Gogh collection to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation. In return, the State undertook to build the Van Gogh Museum and subsequently to ensure that the collection is accessible to everyone forever.

Eleven years later the works were moved from the Stedelijk Museum to a specially designed building by Gerrit Rietveld.

Queen Juliana opened the Van Gogh Museum on 2 June 1973, since when it has drawn visitors from every corner of the world. Two million people now visit the museum every year.

'I can do nothing about it if my paintings don't sell. The day will come, though, when people will see that they're worth more than the cost of the paint and my subsistence, very meagre in fact, that we put into them.'