Vincent and his changing image of God
Lecture by Jaap van Duijn, 2019

We will look into the different phases in the life of Vincent van Gogh. His religious experience and his image of God in addition to the artistic development of Vincent van Gogh's work. Sometimes they go together with his change of residence.

Emo Verkerk, Vincent and his mother

- That Van Gogh still inspires people needs no explanation. For example, look at the painting that modern portrait painter Emo Verkerk made in honor of Van Gogh's 125th year of death. So 2015. The painting is part of a series of Van Gogh portraits and depicts the strictly Reformed mother Anna and Vincent as an art dealer in London (based on one of the few photos known by Vincent). It shows well the relationship between Vincent and his mother.

- Vincent's enormous drive and passion for painting is known. Many people, including myself, have traveled all places where Vincent lived and worked out of fascination for the artist. The website vangoghroute.nl was created from this. All places of residence are described on this website. The development was done by Stichting Gifted Art By Judith de Bruijn, art historian.
Amsterdam, Nederland

Van 25 april - 8 juni 1873

Vanaf begin mei 1873 kon Watson in Amsterdam aan, waarna hij zich daar voor de herfst toevoegde aan een studententochtocht naar de universiteit van Amsterdam.

Lees meer
Van Gogh family

The family: father Theo van Gogh the pastor and mother Anna Carbentus. The children: Vincent, Anna, Theo, Lies, Wil and Cor

Vincent's birth certificate

First of all, a look at his childhood:

• Vincent is born on March 30, 1853.
• He lives with his family in the rectory on the Markt in Zundert.
• There was a piano and the children received music lessons. There were also prints of art performances on the wall.
• Vincent goes first to primary school, but afterwards gets lessons from a governess at home from the age of 9 and then goes to boarding school in Zevenbergen when he is 11 years old. Later he attent also to the Koning Willem II HBS in Tilburg, This was a perfect highschool, where he receives among other things drawing lessons.
• Vincent's youth is characterized by his great involvement with nature. He was always to be found in the fields and forests.
• As a child he is a silent, introverted boy with a gentle nature, who likes to read all kinds of books. He is eager to learn and his linguistic development is fabulous. We can conclude this from the more than 800 letters that he wrote later and that have been preserved.
• Because of the existence of those letters, he is the best traceable painter of the 19th century. He communicates effortlessly in Dutch, French and English.

Grave of earlier Vincent
Church in Zundert

• Father is a minister of the Dutch. Reformed Church in the midst of a predominantly Catholic environment.
• In Zundert there is a tombstone near the church with the inscription: Vincent van Gogh, born and deceased on March 30 in 1852. This was Vincent's older brother who, exactly from the day, was born one year before Vincent and died immediately.
• Vincent grows up in a dogmatic Christian environment and it will need time until the Borinage to arrive at a different view of life.
• His mother was the daughter of a bookseller from the city of Dordrecht
• Her sister Cornelia married the older brother of pastor Van Gogh, whose name was Vincent.
• This Uncle Vincent was called Uncle Cent. He was a successful art dealer in The Hague. The couple had no children and it was common at that time to look for nephews who could possibly take over the business.
• Vincent came to work at the age of 16 as the youngest employee with his uncle in The Hague. The business had since been absorbed by an international art dealer, Goupil & Cie.
• After 3 years in The Hague, he started working at the London branch.
London

- He comes to London and enjoys the English way of life and not at least the parks and museums.
- Here he starts with a detailed Bible study, which will last until his time in Amsterdam.
- He also reads English literature and delves more and more into art painting.
• Visit the Dutch church, which is still there today: Austin Friars, close to St. Paul's Cathedral. In a letter to his sister Anna, he makes a drawing of this church.
• In 1873, his brother Theo, who is 4 years younger, comes to visit him and together they look at visual arts and talk about literature. The bond between the brothers is growing.
• In the summer of 1874 Vincent comes home for a holiday in Helvoirt. There lived his parents.
• There he made chalk drawings and pencil sketches of the Reformed Church. Drawing at the time was no more than a hobby for him.
• Finally, in October of that year, Vincent was reluctantly moved to the Goupil & Cie branch in Paris.

Crayon and pencil drawing, 1874

Paris
• There he meets Harry Gladwell, the son of a London gallery owner. They read each other from the Bible and speak a lot about art. He felt like a cosmopolitan; London and Paris were world cities after all. Paris was already the world center of art at that time.

Palais de Luxembourg, c. 1890
He visited art museums in Paris such as the Musée du Luxembourg and the Louvre.

Vincent was in Paris in the first place to work as an art dealer. However, he paid more attention to the Bible study than to the art trade. Pleasing customers in particular was difficult for him and he began to study the Bible more and more.

In the Christmas holidays of 1875 he talks with his father that he is not enjoying himself in the art trade and that his wish is to become a preacher. He is then 23 years old.

His father, who found it very annoying that Vincent did not adapt to the art trade of his uncle Cent, nevertheless advised him to say goodbye to the art trade.

Vincent is fired from 1 April 1876.

For Vincent, the sense of beauty of art and nature is secondary to his belief in God.

Then the next phase in his life begins:
He follows his inner calling.

Now he wants to become a preacher and take care of people. Unlike his father, much more practical. Working in the municipality and less tight in the doctrine.

He left the Netherlands for England and arrived at Ramsgate There he working for board and lodging as an assistant teacher at a boys' boarding school.

After two months, he arrived in a suburb of London (Isleworth) and worked with Pastor Thomas Slade-Jones, with whom he becomes an assistant. He wrote to his brother in August 1876, which he wanted in depth: "To be connected to Christ with unbreakable ties and to feel those ties. To be sad but always happy. "That is from a text from the Bible of 2 Cor. 6 Where Paul speaks about the service to God.

![Church drawing](image-url)
• On October 29, 1876, he delivered his first sermon in the South London district of Petersham. This sermon can be read online in letter no. 96 to Theo his brother.

• His father was a minister in Etten at that time and Vincent was going home for Christmas. His prospects for the future in England are limited because he hardly receives any wages. Therefore he did not return to England, but stays in Etten.

**Dordrecht**

• Vincent got a job in a bookstore in Dordrecht through his mother Anna. He does this for three months and gets to know the city well. In his room he surrounds himself with prints. In the margins of those illustrations he writes the aforementioned theme several times: “to be sad, but always happy”.

• His interest in everything that has to do with the Bible takes on fanatic traits. In his letters he actually only writes about the Bible and is busy with this book of books every day. He even begins to translate the Bible into English and French during working hours.

• We also can find him in the Dordrechts Museum, where you can see the devotional works of Ary Scheffer, of which Vincent was impressed.

• He focuses on the possibilities to study theology.

**Amsterdam**

• Vincent has an uncle in Amsterdam, who is called Johannes Paulus Stricker and is a pastor. Together with his uncle Stricker and father Van Gogh, they explore the possibilities for getting Vincent to study theology.

• Eventually he goes to Amsterdam and gets a living with his uncle Jan van Gogh, who is the director of the Marinewerf. That yard is next to the current Scheepvaart Museum.
• In preparation for the study of theology, he is taught in various subjects such as algebra and geometry. He often comes to uncle Stricker. There he also meets his daughter Kee Vos, with whom he falls years later. deeply in love

Englisch church, Amsterdam  Kee Vos

• He goes to church three times a day on Sundays, just like in Dordrecht, which starts at seven in the morning with an early sermon. Mainly to Reformed churches, but often also to the Walloon and English churches.

• He participates in counseling at the Sunday school of that English church with the pastor August Carl Adler, the latter against the will of his father, who thinks that he can better spend his time studying. Vincent himself finds the practical interpretation more important than learning Greek or Latin.

• On a weekend Harry Gladwell comes to visit and they go to the three museums that are in Amsterdam by that time: The Trippenhuis, Rembrandthuis and Museum van Hoop. (1877)
• In July 1878, Vincent quit his studies because he couldn't handle it: the package was much too heavy for him and he returned to his parents in Etten.

**Brussels**

• In consultation with his father and Pastor Slade-Jones, his former English employer, one tried to get a solution together.

• An appointment is made at a Protestant Evangelical Training School in Brussels. There you were trained as a missionary without needing a theological study. Most students were sent to the Borinage as a kind of missionaries.

Borinage is the mining region of Belgium around the town of Mons, south of Brussels near the French border. Even no wit is a depressed area.
The square where the building of the Evangelist training was located

- They argue that Vincent may do a brief study to be allowed to work among the miners later. Because he did not pass his exams, he cannot participate in the continuation of the training. Nevertheless, he is allowed to work in the Borinage before the Belgian Evangelization Committee.
- He is appointed for 6 months as a lay preacher in the heart of the Borinage. He goes to live with the Denis family in Wasmes and hold churchservice in a Salon de Bébé.

Rue de Petit Wasmes, Salon de Bébé

- During his stay he drew the people and their harsh environment. He was deeply concerned with them and often portrayed them in a realistic image.
He sees it as his sacred duty to help people. He is so concerned with the fate of the miners that he gives away everything he had. He eventually sleeps on the floor himself and only has a few clothes left.

Because he identifies himself too much with the population, the ecclesiastical authorities decide that he cannot cope with this work and that he diminishes the dignity of the church: he is fired.

Vincent realizes that everything has failed.

He returns to his father and mother in Etten. They see him as socially lost and are very concerned about him. Father van Gogh even wants him to join an institution in Geel for weak gifted people.

He got furious about that idea and fled back to the Borinage.

He asks advice from the evangelist Francq with whom he lives for a short time. Then Vincent goes to live with the neighbors: a foreman in the mines, who wants to take Vincent into the house. That house can still be visited. Vincent completes sketchbook after sketchbook with drawings and becomes calmer.

There will be no contact with the family for almost a year.
The miner's house where Vincent drew for a year

• Vincent is very disappointed in the institute church.
• He knows that he cannot continue as a pastor.
• Here he makes his irrevocable decision to become a painter. He now sees it as his sacred task to put the Divine in nature and man on the canvas. Only four years ago, when he started his career as an assistant pastor, he ranked Art Painting and nature behind the supreme Bible.
• Only now in the Borinage, when he finds that he has been abandoned by his father and has been set aside by the church, is there a change to wanting to convey the Divine of nature and man in his paintings.
• But at least Theo comes to visit him by train and helps him financially, but especially emotionally. He arranges that Vincent can go to the art academy in Brussels to continue studying there.
• Vincent is now 27 years old; that is only 10 years before his death.
**Brussels**

- In Brussels, Vincent meets Anton van Rappard, an artist with whom he will be friends for a long time. He is urged not only to draw but also to try to make paintings (by Willem Roelofs a big name from the Dutch art movement of the Haagsche School.)
- As we know Vincent by now: he doesn't like the academic character of the art academy at all and he quits the visual arts education and goes home.
- The question is of course: when will he actually start painting? Because until now he only made sketches and pencil drawings.
- When it comes to oil paint, it really is only in The Hague.

**The Hague**

- Vincent's mother has a cousin in The Hague, the painter Anton Mauve. There he is trained in the technique of painting, making paint himself and for painting and use of color.
- He learns a lot from his skilled uncle.
- He is accepted by the artists of the Hague school, but he is just one of many followers.
- In The Hague he meets George Hendrik Breitner, who, just like Vincent, wanted to paint people after their real life.
Torn-up Noordstraat with diggers, 1882

• The kind of faith of his father and mother brings him nothing. He sees more in really helping people and nothing in the dogmatic of the church.

Rooftop, 1882

• Out of compassion, but also to have a free model, he lives with Sien Hoornik, a prostitute. He does love her and is caring.
• They live on the Schenkweg. Of course he reproduced the view on canvas.

**Drenthe**

• Under pressure from his family, he leaves Sien and got by train to Drenthe to paint nature. Max Liebermann and Anton van Rappard have also painted there and advised him to do the same in that unspoil world.

**Nuenen**

• After spending nearly three months in the peat colonies, he returns home poor and discouraged, this time to Nuenen where his father has his new place of work.

• His mother breaks a leg and he lovingly takes care of her

The potato eaters, 1885

• Here Vincent maked his first masterpiece *The Potato Eaters*. Emeritus professor Anton Wessels gives this painting a very different interpretation than that of a naturalist work by a painter who wants to romanticize. Namely as a work by a painter who wanted to portray the harsh reality, in the same way as Rembrandt did, whom Vincent admired very much.

• Wessel's description: "The eyes of the figures shine from the inside. Due to the steam from the potatoes we see a figure with a halo. So a saint. We
could see the holy supper in it. The solemn gestures, hand around the chalice (bowl). The crucifix still hangs on the wall."

- Whether Wessel’s interpretation is correct or not: art historians in any case agree that it is a Protestant work in the sense that: "man must work for his bread and earn it fairly". Vincent himself also writes about this: "painting peasant life is something serious and I would have blamed myself if this did not resonate."

- In the two years that Vincent has lived in Nuenen, During his stay he painted around 200 paintings and many drawings.

- He has a hard time with himself and his existence, he actually feels betrayed by his family and the people in the village and is insecure.

The old church tower at Nuenen with a ploughman, 1884

- Father His father dies due to a heart attack on the rectory’s doorstep.

- He sends his father’s State– Bible together with the painting he makes of it to Theo. In the still life the bible has been opened about in the passage in Isaiah about ‘the man of sorrows’.

- He ads an extinguished candle to it and the book "La Joie de Vivre" by Emile Zola. The joy of life. The ambiguity that Vincent puts in this painting will therefore not be unnoticed, certainly not Theo.
• Vincent differed enormously with his father in the value of faith. While his father interpreted the rules of the Bible primarily dogmatically, Vincent felt that faith without love was impossible.

Vincent van Gogh, Still Life with Bible, 1885

• Vincent did not have an easy character and mother Anna urges Vincent to leave the house. He will then live with the sexton in the village.
• After more disagreement in the family, he goes to Antwerp and enrolls at the art academy.
• He will never return to the Netherlands.
• Fortunately his works are coming back!

Antwerp
• In Antwerp he can again work according to the model, that was made impossible by the catholic pastor in Nuenen.
The art Academy of Antwerp

- He visits art dealers to sell his work, but without success. The work he had made in Nuenen had remained there,
- His mother stored it all at the attic of a carpenter ... The works have long been forgotten, Sometimes peraces have been popping up and only appeared after Vincent's death.
- He works hard and mainly studied Rubens colorite and brushwork. He ate badly, drank, smokes a pipe and was bothered by his teeth.
- Even Here too Vincent did not last long. Even before the course at the academy ends, he takes the train and went to Paris, where his brother worked as an art dealer.

**Paris**

- The city was bustling with life and already had electric light. The world exhibitions of 1878 and 1889 each attracted 28 million international visitors.
• He is going to live with Theo on Rue Lepic in the Montmartre district.
• Through his brother Theo he meets many like-minded artists, such as Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Emile Bernard, Paul Signac and many others.
• With a few other starting artists, they organize an exhibition of their works. It is not a success, but Paul Gauguin, who already had a name, liked to come and see it all.
• Theo works at Goupil & Co, the company where Vincent had also worked more than ten years before. Goupil has a workshop in Paris where prints are made and they have sales branches in New York, The Hague, Brussels and London.
• Vincent has become much more mundane in all this time: he is now 33 years old and enjoys the café and nightlife to the fullest. In the days of Goupil, he was a loyal Bible reader, now not at all anymore.
• In this time he has a relationship with the lady-owner of Le Tambourin, a dance venue where many artists stayed at night. He makes the Agostina Segatori painting in Le Tambourin of her. In the background you see Japanese prints that became popular at the time.
The painting on the left is on the hill is the mill of Le Blute fin in Montmartre. A few years ago this painting was recognized as a real van Gogh and is now owned by the Fundatie in Zwolle.

- He sees many exhibitions, including the last exhibition by the Impressionists in 1886. After this exhibition, the group falls apart. He doesn't care much for the work of these impressionists.
- He gets his paint from "father Tanguy", often in exchange for a painting.
- He also goes to Siegfried Bing, a dealer in woodcuts and prints from Japan. For many modern painters in Paris, such work is a sensation, because the compositions are very different from what people are used to. Claude Monet, for example, hangs them later in his house in Giverny and with Vincent the walls of his room are full of them.
- Vincent acquires all kinds of new styles of painting technics in a short time.
- In Paris, for example, he is receiving a crash course "post-modernism". He is completely detached from the gray and dark colors of the Hague School.
• He speaks with many artists and absorbs the new way of painting. He even practices the pointillism of Georges Seurat and Paul Signac. But he soon comes to the conclusion that this scientific approach to painting and that monk work with all those dots is not for him.

• When he has been in Paris for almost two years, he wants to work differently; he is looking more than before for light and for color and he wants to express his feelings and experience in areas of color.

• He also makes many self-portraits and flower still lifes there.
• Even though it was sometimes very difficult for Theo to live in one house with the irresistible and headstrong Vincent, after a first difficult period the friendship between Theo and Vincent only became closer. Theo sees two sides in Vincent: sometimes obstinate and harsh; sometimes gifted, fine and soft.

• Vincent greatly values his brother's judgment of his work.

• His brother Theo benefits from Vincent's contacts with contemporary artists. His art trade is known among the new generation of painters of the post-impressionists.

• Vincent van Gogh delves into books and poems: he reads a lot. He talks in depth with his friend Emile Bernard (poet and painter). Emile will remain his friend for the rest of his life and will also be present at his funeral three years later.
Four faded sunflowers, 1887

- In his paintings he is close to poetry and the whether or not Eternal. Without going to church in Paris, he was true to the belief that God lived in nature and that much was for Eternal.
- His paintings have a depth, such as the still life with the cut sunflowers: pulled out of life, as it were, but prominently portrayed. This work symbolizes the End of a very beautiful Life!
- In the hills and mills of Montmartre he clearly conveys desolation.

La Butte Montmartre, 1886

- Van Gogh does not compose a painting, but chooses a subject that he displays as realistic as possible. His special ability to leave his own feeling behind in the painting still fascinates us. Over the years we have appreciated it even more.
• He uses a clever trick by putting sixteen different dyed wool balls in a lacquer box. This enabled him to study the interaction of colors with each other without immediately using expensive paint.

• Artistic Paris was influenced by the arrival of Japanese drawings and paintings.

• The colorful prints, special compositions and simplicity were completely new. Van Gogh fully participates in this modernity, see the backgroud of the painting by father Tanguy.

![Père Tanguy, 1887](image1.jpg) ![Emile Bernard, Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin, 1888](image2.jpg)

**Arles**

• Ultimately, his desire for what the Japanese prints have to offer in color and clarity is so strong that he leaves for the South of France where he hopes to find the same bright colors. He initially intended to go to Marseille. But he doesn't end up there: he gets out in Arles on a cold February month.

• And what did he think about God in that period? In fact, we don't know much about that, because he wrote few letters in Paris; After all, Theo was his roommate. What we do know is that he wonders: “Is the Bible good enough for us? He thinks that if Jesus were on earth now he would say: He is not here, he has risen and what do you look for the living among the dead? He comes to the conclusion that we ourselves are responsible for the way we stand at the world and have to do well. So actually to work on a better world.

• He is now much more guided by the novels of Émile Zola and the Goncourt brothers and takes his guidelines from it. He has a great compassion for people who have less than himself.
• In Nuenen he made a painting of the Bible. Although he painted books in Paris, but no longer the Bible, see for example *Still life with three novels* from 1887.
• These high literary works represent Van Gogh himself: his Christian strict lifestyle changes into socialist ideas. Art and life formed a unity for Van Gogh: no life without art.

• In Arles he makes absolute masterpieces, such as the Sunflowers but certainly also the Bridge in Arles (Pont de Langlois).

• He goes completely loose and renews himself, all in a very bright colorful palette. His representations are actually much more powerful than reality. The Roman cemetery, for example, now looks gray and gray, but not in Vincent's work! There it is full of liveliness and bright yellow colors.
• The painting: “Café terrace by night”
• This is on Place de Forum, where you can still sit today but it is a lot less colorful than the famous work suggests. (Many people think it's a Parisian café face, but that's not true)

Already in Paris, he left out the realistic use of color and used bright colors. Due to the inspiring environment in Arles, this is now fully reflected in his work. The own feelings and emotions that he puts into the works are strongly expressed. For him, color and feeling must match. He is self-assured for the first time in his life and works at record speed in his new style inspired by Japanese art.
• Not at least the many paintings with the subject “Orchard in Blossom”. Van Gogh seeks the Eternal in the delicate blossom. He is looking for more credibility for a better life. He had never taken a motif like a flowering tree that so directly caresses the eye, that makes people feel better. The tree as the eternal, the blossom as fleeting but of unprecedented beauty. Its fruit trees radiate their own light. The tree itself is the source of light.

• In March of 1888 his masterteacher for painting and also his uncle Anton Mauve died in Laren. Immediately he makes the painting “Souvenir de Mauve”.

• In Arles he makes many wanderings in the surrounding landscape to portray the most beautiful landscapes on the canvas. He is seen as a stranger, he is lonely and in a certain sense isolated. He did have a few friends though, such as the postman Joseph Roulin, whom he later captured on the canvas. He relies on the many moments of ecstasy and is driven to work in the landscape.

• And for the first time he sees a happy future for his paintings.

• His involvement with people is reflected in his entire oeuvre, also in Arles. With The Sower (which he made after Millet's example) and with which
God is meant, he concludes a series of harvest landscapes. Because the sun is placed directly behind the head, the sower has a halo and he seems to radiate himself. The blue sky and the greenish-yellow earth have changed their color. These subjects therefore rise above their own performance.

- The desire to design a better world is increasingly coming to the fore.
- Van Gogh goes further and further in the conceptual context of his paintings: he thinks a lot before he entrusts it to the canvas. He can work incredibly quickly and puts everything on the canvas in one go.
- He writes to Theo about his paintings: "People will say that it was made too quickly, but tell them then, that they looked too quickly."

![Starry Night over the Rhone, 1888](image)

- Because van Gogh now also went at night painting, a feeling came over him that, in addition to being inspired by Japanese art, he could use this natural of the starry sky for a better world.
- We live in 1888 just before the world exhibition in Paris with the Eifel tower as the most important structure, which was to symbolize the 100-year-old Republic. There was plenty of electric lighting, and an observatory was put on top of the Eifel tower. The newspapers were full of it. Vincent transforms this fantasy of the future into this night painting, in which he rejects materialism and technology.
- When he is outside at night, he is occupied with two things. He has a tendency to religion again due to the splendor of stars and he gives his conscience space: he seeks the purity of his soul.
- Vincent wanted to found a real artists' colony in the Yellow House. He wrote many of his artistic friends to come, but none came except Paul Gauguin. He came to Arles in October at the insistence of Theo. Gauguin is a painter from Normandy who, among other things, made the painting Vision after the sermon.
The vision after the sermon, 1888

Paul Gauguin, Van Gogh, 1888

The Yellow House (The Street), 1888

The current situation

- It also shows the diagonal tree, a motif from Japanese prints that is also used by Gauguin. Although he painted many subjects from Christianity, he was actually an atheist (Catholic by origin).
- He does make the statement: the only way to God is to do what he does: namely: creating! He also cultivates the suffering of Christ by presenting himself as a misunderstood painter.
- They must have discussed much about faith, the Bible, and other matters of life, because that was what they were constantly doing alongside painting: discussing. Vincent saw Gauguin as his teacher.
- Gauguin painted directly from his imagination, while Van Gogh always needed a concrete representation to paint after. That leads also to continuous confrontations.
- In December the tension rises high and Gauguin leaves the house without saying a word. Vincent thinks he is leaving for good and is frightened by the fear that his dream of founding an artist colony will fall apart. Then he loses his mind, cuts off a piece of his ear and bleeds terribly.
- The next morning he is admitted to the hospital.
- Theo comes and travels a few days later with Gauguin to Paris back when he sees that Vincent is being treated well.
• Vincent is fired after 14 days out of the hospital and starts painting again.
• In the time that he painted in Arles, he used large color areas. At this time he way of painting technic chanes to more winding lines. It is believed by experts that this type of painting is partly due to his illness.

• In his *Orchard in bloom with poplars* Vincent depicts a deeply symbolic work (at least that is the explanation of an arthistorican).
• He gives here an image of himself and his grief about being labeled as a crazy and dangerous person. The road to the challenging panorama is
completely blocked by the 3 poplars. The better world is behind the poplars.

- He actually paints 3 bars from the room where he is.
- The irrevocability of his situation with new attacks and solitary confinement will prevent him from ever participating in enjoying spring and nature.
- The spitter stands for the godly hard-working man "who has to earn his living in the sweat of his face." He actually had let go of this image since Paris.
- However, the old Protestant mores returned in this period.
- The painting, however lovely it may seem, is the dismantling of his hope.

**Saint-Rémy**

- A pastor takes him to an institute for the mentally ill where he is voluntarily admitted, Saint-Paul-de-Mausole near the town of Saint-Rémy.

- Because he is allowed to paint there in a monastery environment and is accompanied by skilled doctors and nurses, he easily conforms to the prescribed regime and the seclusion that awaits him.
- His stay and the things he needs to paint are paid for by Theo. For Vincent, his life consisted mainly of the objective of ever repaying this by making good paintings.
- He is thrown back on himself. It brings him to the stage of art as a survival technique: after all, as long as he can paint, there is still a future.
Theo, who received all the paintings by rail in Paris, immediately saw the change in his new period of expressing his feelings.

The colors have become more intense, he sees the composition of his brothers' world of thought reflected in the works delivered.

Irises, 1889

Vincent delivers a complex but very artistic oeuvre from St. Rémy. Van Gogh once again manages to enhance the effects of his experience with his pasty way of applying paint.

Things are actually no longer what they should seem to us. They are symbols that now give us back feeling and emotion. Perhaps the painting of the cypresses best reflects his condition and also his new artistic succession in his oeuvre.

Do not think that Vincent wanted to make beautiful landscape pictures in St. Remy. He wanted to paint in Arles for a better world, here he sees a demon behind every bush.
• Some art historians say that this painting is Van Gogh's personal view of Gethsémané. See the mountains on the right as the olive mountain and the town as Jerusalem. The cypresses stand as a dark threat of impending doom.
• In his letters to his Parisian friend Bernard, he does indeed have a discussion about Christ on the Mount of Olives.
• The work mainly symbolizes a hymn of praise to the omnipotence of creation.
• He gets an attack in St. Remy that keeps him off painting for 5 weeks.
• He will then use Delacroix works as an example (because he cannot work outside, he will work on prints).
Van Gogh makes his *Pieta* after a print that Theo sends. With that he sets down an image of himself as Christ. The depicted face can be seen as Van Gogh himself. In this way he connects Christ's suffering with his own suffering.

He also makes a painting of the *Raising of Lazarus* after an etching by Rembrandt. In fact, he represents the creative power of God. There too his own face is included as part of the resurrection. In this case of his anxious time (?).

He therefore clearly looks in the Bible for the symbolism that fits his situation. In fact, the connection with his religious education returns. However, the former fanatic has completely disappeared.
• Very few people had seen Vincent's work in Paris. Only a few art dealers and father Tanguy had some works. His brother sometimes showed it to potential buyers at home, but nobody was ever interested.

• On 3 Sept. 1889 there was an exhibition for modern art in Paris. Two works by Vincent had been hung by Theo. The *Starry Night over the Rhone* from Arles and the *Irises* from Saint Rémy.

• That was a pivot point, because there was a positive reaction in the newspaper of an art critic. A few months later in Brussels it was a hit: his painting *Red Vineyards near Arles* was bought by Anna Boch at the exhibition of Les Vingt for 400 francs (the allowance that Theo transferred for 10 years was 300 francs per month). It is the only work sold during his lifetime. His *Sunflowers* were dismissed by a journalist with "the horrible pot of sunflowers from Monsieur Van Gogh". The insight was therefore still far away.

• Theo had meanwhile made a name for himself as an art dealer for modern painters and sold works by Claude Monet, among others. This impressionist also saw Vincent's paintings and labeled them the best of the present (but did not buy them).
• In the meantime, Theo marries Jo Bonger and they have a son whom they call Vincent. Vincent becomes godfather in February 1890.
• He then paints the flowering almond branches, as he painted many flowering trees in Arles.

![Almond Blossom, 1890](image)

• The hope that this painting radiates applies to a new human life! With the arrival of the new heir, the family becomes a place of security again.
• He wants to go back north again.

**Auvers**
• Because he voluntarily went to the institution, his dismissal is no problem.
• On May 16, 1890 the time has come. He takes the train to Paris and stays with his brother and sister-in-law for a few days. Here he also sees the huge stock of unsold paintings in the attic. He is deeply disappointed!
• In the meantime, his brother had found a doctor, Dr. Gachet, in a village of Auvers-sur-l'Oise above Paris. This doctor collected modern paintings and also painted: there was sufficient discussion material. Vincent moves to the village
• He immediately starts painting again, but with a technic of a much quieter and more refined atmosphere than before.
• Among other things, he makes the magisterial work *The Church of Auvers*. It reminds him of Nuenen, where he often painted the church tower.

• Around 80 masterpieces are created here in 2 months.
• His works express great optimism, which are created day in day out.
The important French painter Charles-François Daubigny, who had passed away in the meantime, had a house with a beautiful flower garden in the same village, which Vincent naturally entrusted directly to the canvas.

Theo and Jo come to Auvers with little Vincent at the end of June and have lunch with Dr. Gachet and his daughter Marguérite. Vincent plays with little Vincent and he seems happy.

He has his place in the Ravoux Inn, at the center of the village. Every evening he eats there at the same place in the café. He had a room upstairs.
• He continues painting and makes more than one painting a day. Among other things, he makes his Crows in the wheatfield. In it, many interpreters see his impending doom.

Wheatfield with crows, 1890

Tree roots, 1890

• His last work is the Tree Roots and this is now a symbol for the end of Vincent's life.
• His life ends with a shot in the wheat field. By a revolver. Nobody knows where he got it from. On July 27, 1890, he dragged himself up the stairs at the guest house of Ravoux, badly wounded. He still lives for two days.
Auberge Ravoux, still an inn and now also a ‘Maison de Van Gogh’

- Doctor Gachet is brought in. His brother is being warned.
- Theo comes by train to Auvers on the following day. He finds his dear brother on the bed.
- Vincent dies in the arms of his brother.
- In his pocket he has a letter not sent to Theo. It states, among other things, that Theo is an inseparable part of the possibility of making paintings that, even in all circumstances and tensions, continue to form a large harmonic work of art. That Theo has always supported him with great human compassion.
- In Zundert there is a statue made by the famous sculptor Ossip Zadkine with the text from the last letter.
• Much is being guessed about Vincent's real motives for putting an end to his life, such as:
  o Madness has returned .... A demon has caught him.
  o By putting an end to his physical life, his ideas live on. So just like with Christ.
  o Some time ago a book was published by the American Steven Naifeh, who thinks that Vincent was injured in a fight with advanced youth.
  o Another thought is that he no longer wanted to burden his brother with the running costs. Vincent has thought in the past that his brother could pay him for his sales, but nothing could be further from the truth. Theo paid everything out of its own pocket for ten years. Of course the deal was that Vincent had to send everything he made to Theo to sell, but that selling never actually happened. Honorable comments, but no customers.
  o There will be few brothers in this world who believe in each other so deeply and know how to sustain this for ten years.
  o If Theo had not financed his brother, we would never have seen Vincent's works. Then making art would have been impossible and Vincent would have left us only a few sketchbooks. We must be very grateful to Theo.
• We can conclude from his letters to his mother, among others, that his thought of the Bible was present at the end of his life. He then refers to the letter to the Corinthians about love. He says that he thinks he is inadequate and that he missed family life, that he needed something bigger than himself.
• Vincent van Gogh is buried on July 30, 1890. There were many sunflowers.
• His works were set up in the room where the chest stood, like a halo around him.
• Emile Bernard and Père Tanguy are among others. Together with Theo and Dr. Gachet they walk to the cemetery.
• Dr. Gachet tried to say a few words of thanks, but that resulted in stammering because he was overwhelmed with grief. Theo writes to their mother that Vincent found the peace that he could not find on this earth.
• For Theo, the death of his dearly beloved brother is also the final blow that you can see as the desecration of everything he believed in.
• Theo never got over it and dies six months later in Utrecht on 25 Jan. 1891. First he is buried there, but when Jo carefully reads Vincent's intense letters to Theo and she translates them, she decides that Theo should be with his brother in Auvers.
• Theo has been buried next to Vincent in Auvers since 1914.
Counts of Vincent and Theo in Auvers

• After the death of Theo, his wife Jo Bonger has nothing to look for in Paris. She returns to the Netherlands with her 1 year old son Vincent and as heir to the approximately 600 paintings made by her brother-in-law Vincent. She first lives in Bussum, where she opens a pension for her livelihood and later she goes to live with her 2nd husband in Amsterdam.
• She has a firm faith in the works of her brother-in-law stored in the basement of the house.
• It will be another 12 years after Vincent's death before the art world began to understand what this genius had accomplished for incredible, moving works.
• Many painters from the later art movements were inspired by Vincent and continued what he had left behind.
• Vincent van Gogh is the hub of the established order of the 19th century towards modernism of the 20th.
• His name is more known now to people than several Apostles from the Bible.
• That is because in the meantime people have recognized his holy belief in different thinking and progress.
• Between 1905 and 1925 half of the legacy of paintings is sold. It started in 1905 there is a first exhibition at the Stedelijk Amsterdam. After the inheritance in 1925 her son Vincent, then 33 years old, gave up. He stops selling and keeps the collection together.

• It was not until 1962 that the collection was transferred to the Dutch State on loan and that made it possible to open the Van Gogh Museum in 1973. For painting this is now a holy temple that attracts 2 million international visitors a year. In 2018 the first time they beat the famous Rijksmuseum.

• The other "holy temple" is the Kröller-Müller museum on the Hoge Veluwe. Since 1908, Helene Kröller-Müller has purchased hundreds of drawings and dozens of paintings from Vincent, thereby building the second largest Van Gogh collection in the world.
During Vincent's short life of 37 years there are actually 5 phases in his experience of God:
1. In his youth the strict Protestant upbringing (until his 19th year)
2. The time that he was fanatically engaged everything from the Bible to reason. (19-23)
3. His drive to become a minister, pastor, or missionary. (23-27)
4. His aversion (his dislike) to the Institute Church. (27-34)
5. His need to anchor his faith, the search for the right image of God and the interpretation of love for family, because he does not find full compensation in his painting (from 34-37).

This is how you see the changes in his life and thinking about his image of God. So the Bible never really let him go.
It is possible for us to see at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo what phenomenal progress his struggle has brought.

When you visit these paintings with this grand symbolism, the most important thing is: “You look with your eyes, but you see with your soul!”

In this way we can still experience every day what the work of this virtuoso artist of the highest level has produced: A truly God's gift!

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