



PROJECT MUSE®

Vincent van Gogh

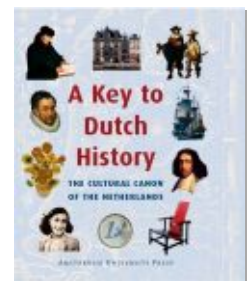
Published by

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A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76693>.



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1853 - 1890

Vincent van Gogh

The modern artist

Every year, some one and a half million people visit the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Eighty to ninety percent of these visitors come from outside the Netherlands. The Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh is famous in all four corners of the globe.

This was not the case in the nineteenth century during his lifetime. Van Gogh had a difficult life filled with upheaval, lost loves and financial problems. Despair ultimately drove him to commit suicide. Only after his death did his star begin to rise. On the one hand, this was because of his paintings: powerful images, with vibrant colours, different. Many people of all ages appreciate his work. On the other hand, people are interested in Van Gogh's life story. His is the textbook tale of the artist whose genius is only matched by his loneliness.

Van Gogh was born in 1853 in the village of Zundert in the province of Brabant. At a young age he travelled across the Netherlands and Europe. In 1885, in Nuenen, he painted the famous picture "The Potato Eaters", a dark portrait of a peasant family. The following year he went to Paris. Van Gogh's brother Theo, an art dealer in Paris, showed him paintings and drawings of the Impressionists, artists whose use of colour and light was more refined than what Vincent was used to. Vincent was also impressed by the Japanese prints he viewed.

In 1888, he rented a studio in the south of France: the "Yellow House" in Arles. He wrote to his younger sister Wil that the lavish natural beauty of the south demanded a new way of painting: "Distinctly colourful: sky blue, pink, orange, vermillion, bright yellow,

bright green, bright wine-red, violet”. Vincent painted landscapes and, because he could not afford to pay for models, many self-portraits.

The French artist Paul Gauguin came to stay with Vincent, but they had an argument. Van Gogh became so confused that he threatened Gauguin with a razor. Shortly afterwards Van Gogh cut off a portion of his left ear, either accidentally or on purpose. Some of his self-portraits show him with his ear bandaged.

Van Gogh became increasingly neurotic and had himself committed to a psychiatric

institution where he painted his famous cypresses and starry skies. On 27 July 1890 he walked into a corn field and shot himself in the chest. He died two days later.

Today, Vincent van Gogh is such a highly appreciated artist that his work hangs in museums throughout the world and is worth huge amounts of money. His portrait of the owner of the café in Arles, “*L’Arlésienne*”, was auctioned in New York in 2006 for 40.3 million dollars (33.9 million euros). That is the equivalent of the price of a Boeing 737 commercial airliner.

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Sub-topics

Primary education sector

The development of Van Gogh’s work based on several paintings
Colours and their effect
Appreciation of Van Gogh in the Netherlands and elsewhere today

Secondary education sector

The influence of Vincent van Gogh and what influenced him
The Hague School
Photography and painting
The Eighties Movement
Art and the market (collectors since Theo, museums, art dealers, auction houses)

Past and Present

What does “beautiful” mean in the sentence: I think Van Gogh’s sunflowers are beautiful?
The place in China where copies of Van Gogh’s works are mass-produced (“Van Gogh from the sweatshop”: *Spiegel online*, 23 August 2006)
The market value of Van Gogh, museums and private collectors

In the Treasure Chest

Cube with paintings of Van Gogh
Replica of a letter to his brother Theo

References

Places to Go

Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum
Otterlo: Museum Kröller-Müller
Maastricht: Tefaf
The Hague: Panorama Mesdag

Books for young people

Ceciel de Bie, *Mijn broer Vincent van Gogh: Een kunstboek voor kinderen over Theo en Vincent van Gogh*. Zwolle: Waanders, 2002
Frank Groothof, “Vincent en Theo, broeders in de kunst”. An introduction to Vincent van Gogh and his brother Theo, the Van Gogh Museum and the collection. For primary school, years 4-6. Orders can be placed with the Education Department of the Van Gogh Museum: email onderwijs@vangoghmuseum.nl (10+ info)
Sean Connolly, *Het leven en werk van Vincent van Gogh* (7+ info)

Background literature

Leo Jansen, “Nuenen: Gerwenseweg 4. Vincent van Gogh schildert de aardappeleters” in Jan Bank and Marita Mathijssen, *Plaatsen van herinnering: Nederland in de negentiende eeuw*, Amsterdam 2006
H. van Crimpen and M. Berends-Alberts (ed.), *De brieven van Vincent van Gogh*, The Hague 1990

Websites

www.kmm.nl (Kröller-Müller Museum)
www.vangoghmuseum.nl
www.vggallery.com/international/dutch (complete works)
www.vangoghzundert.nl (birth place)