

# Vincent Willem van Gogh

1853 –  
1890



Self-Portrait (1889)

Vincent van Gogh, who was born in Zundert in the Netherlands on 30th March 1853, was a Post-Impressionist artist. Post-Impressionism is a style of art that uses real-life situations, vivid colours (that don't always match the colour of something in real life) and thick paint. The year before Vincent's birth, his parents had a child, also called Vincent, who died when he was born. After the second Vincent's birth, the family had five other children – three girls and two boys.

Growing up, the Van Gogh children enjoyed going on long walks in the countryside with their parents as a family. This gave Vincent a love of nature that would influence his art.

Vincent didn't enjoy his time at school. Halfway through his second year at a new secondary school in 1868, Vincent left and never went to another school. It is not known why he left.

In 1873, Vincent moved to London where he worked for an art dealer. While in London, he spent a lot of time at the British Museum and the National Gallery. The paintings by Millet and Breton were some of his favourites. In 1876, he was dismissed from his job. That same year, Vincent worked for a short time as a teaching assistant in the United Kingdom and during this time, made lots of sketches of his surrounding area. Vincent then wished to become a vicar but failed to pass the exam to enter college. Following that, he worked as a lay-preacher (an unofficial vicar) in the Borinage mining region in Belgium. Although he was very dedicated to his work (so much so that he became known as 'the Christ of the coal mines'), after his contract ended, he wasn't offered another one. Struggling to find a permanent job, Vincent's parents and brother, Theo, often had to give him money.

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Vincent wrote regularly to Theo and often included sketches he had done. Theo convinced him to pursue art and, in November 1880, Vincent enrolled at the Academie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Belgium. Here, amongst other things, he learnt more about drawing people. Vincent also took painting lessons from the artist, and relative, Anton Mauve. In 1886, he moved to France to learn more about art from Fernand Cormon before moving south in 1888 with the painter Paul Gauguin.

Vincent fell in love with a woman called Kee Vos but she didn't return his feelings. He then had a relationship with a lady called Sien Hoornik. For a while, he lived with Sien and her two children but eventually, the couple parted.

Throughout his life, Vincent struggled with mental health problems. In December 1888, following an argument with Gauguin, Vincent lost his left ear – some historians believe he did it himself while others claim there is evidence to suggest Gauguin cut it off with a sword. He spent time in hospital but continued to struggle, even after he was discharged. Vincent never recovered and on 27th July 1890, he tried to end his life. He died 30 hours later.



The Potato Eaters (1885)

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Vincent left over 850 paintings, having only sold one during his lifetime. His most famous works include *The Potato Eaters* (1885), *Sunflowers* (1887) and *Portrait of Dr Gachet* (1890).

One of Vincent's most admired paintings is *The Starry Night*. It was painted on canvas using oil paints. The painting is Vincent's impression of the view from his hospital room. Vincent used many different tones of blue to give a feeling of depth. In the top right-hand corner, there is the moon and to the left of the centre is the planet, Venus. The other circles are stars. The sky and the hills look almost like rolling waves, creating a sense of movement. The dark shape at the front of the painting is a cypress tree and there are lights visible in some of the windows of the houses in the village. Although he painted the picture in France, the church steeple is similar to churches in the Netherlands where Vincent grew up and where his dad was a minister.



*The Starry Night* (1889)

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