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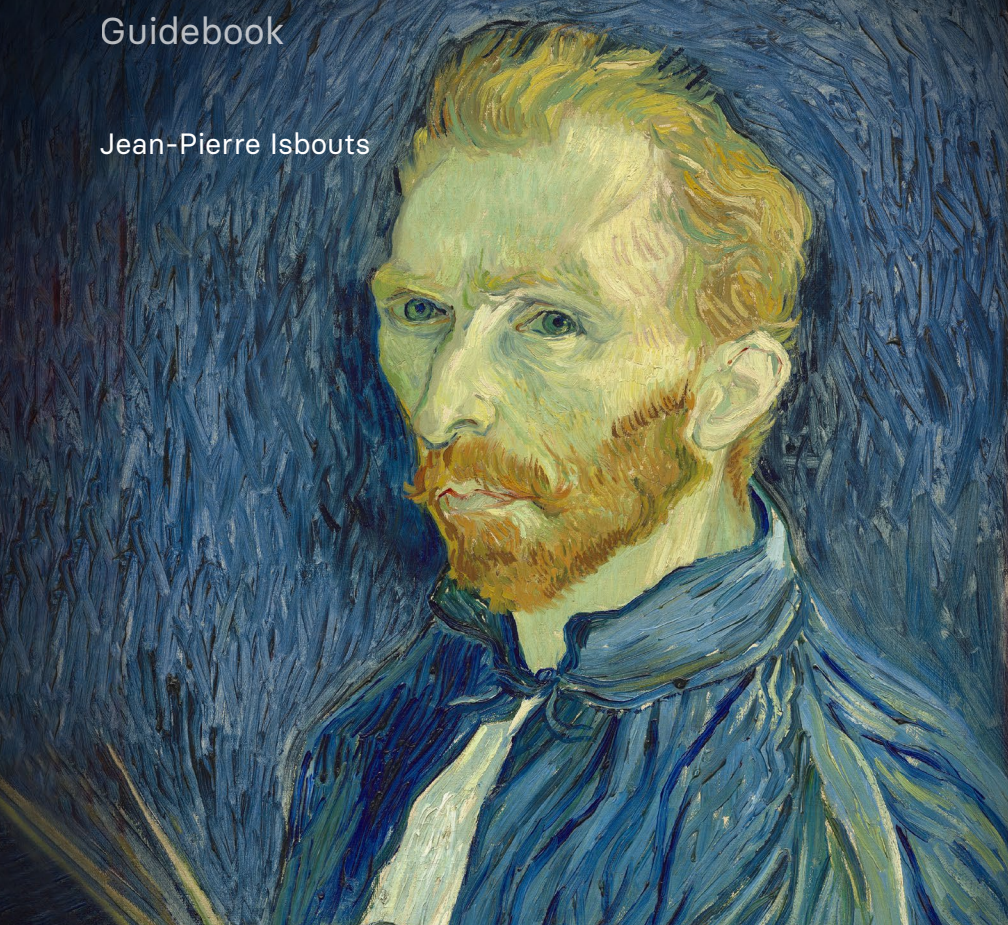
In the Footsteps of Vincent van Gogh

Guidebook

Jean-Pierre Isbouts



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Jean-Pierre Isbouts

Jean-Pierre Isbouts is an art historian and best-selling National Geographic author. He has served as a member of the doctoral faculty at Fielding Graduate University, where he is a Humanities Professor, for more than 15 years. He earned his DLitt at Leiden University.

Jean-Pierre's work includes the authentication of a canvas in Geneva, Switzerland, as Leonardo da Vinci's first version of the *Mona Lisa*, which prompted a BBC TV special. In 2019, he discovered that da Vinci and his workshop produced a second version of da Vinci's famous *Last Supper* fresco, and he traced the work to a remote abbey in Belgium. This was covered in a TV special on NBC's *TODAY*.

Jean-Pierre gained worldwide renown with his book *The Biblical World*. His books on biblical history include *In the Footsteps of Jesus*, *Who's Who in the Bible*, *The Story of Christianity*, and *Archaeology of the Bible*. He has written a number of books on art with coauthor Dr. Christopher Heath Brown, including *Young Leonardo*, *The da Vinci Legacy*, and *The Dalí Legacy*.

Jean-Pierre is also the author of National Geographic's *Ultimate Visual History of the World* and coauthor of *Mapping America*, written with Neal Asbury. His films include *Van Gogh Revisited* with Leonard Nimoy; *Walt: The Man behind the Myth* with Dick Van Dyke; *Inside the Cold War* with David Frost; and *The Search for the "Mona Lisa"* with Morgan Freeman. As a musicologist, he has produced recordings by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and other ensembles and soloists.

Jean-Pierre is also the expert for the Great Course *The History and Archaeology of the Bible*.

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The World of Vincent van Gogh

This series is organized not by period or style but by location. By following in Vincent's footsteps through the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, you will begin to understand the world of this restless genius and see the subjects of his art the way he saw them.

The Netherlands

- Zundert
- Zevenbergen
- Tilburg
- The Hague
- Dordrecht
- Amsterdam
- Etten
- Nuenen
- Drenthe

England

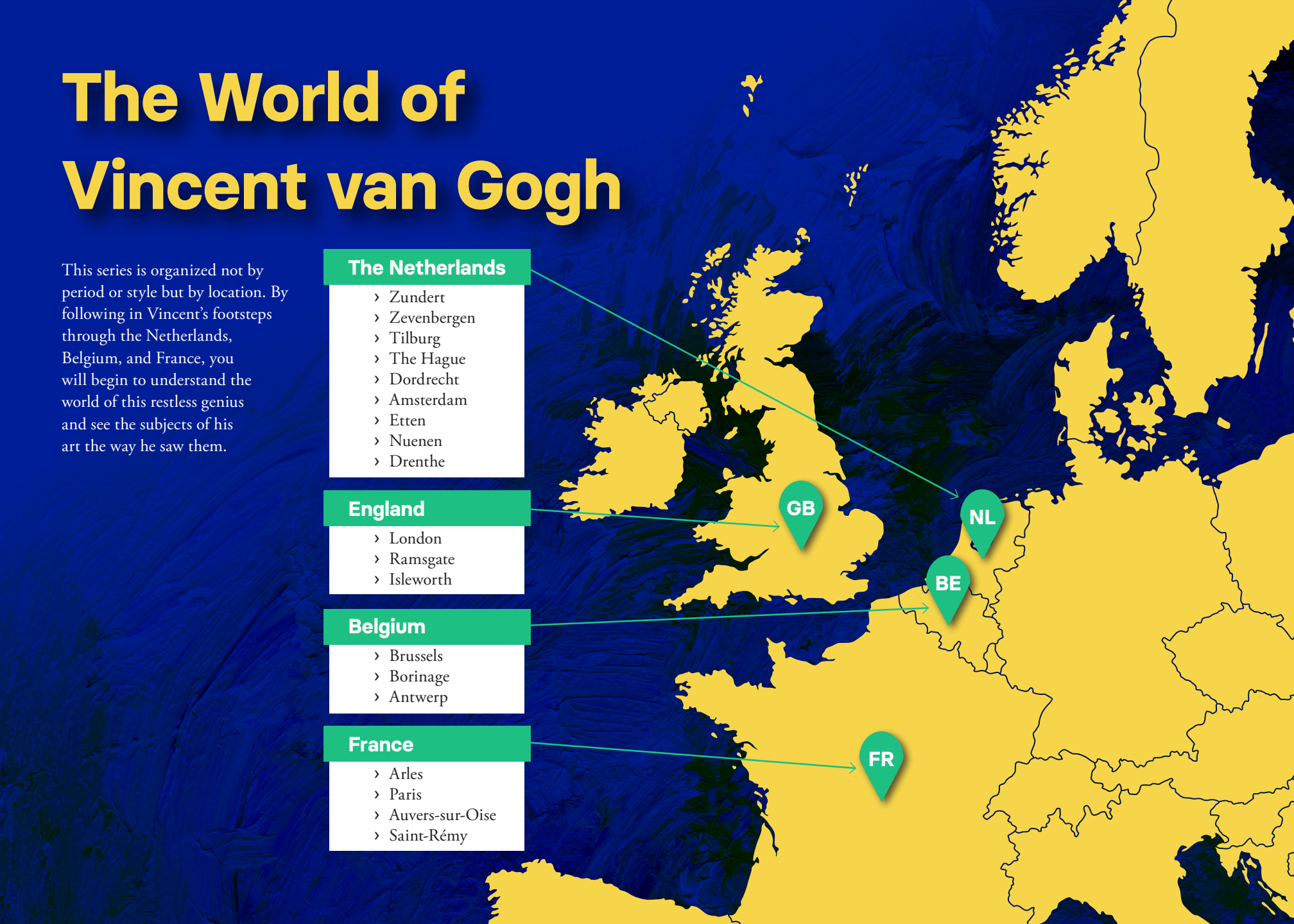
- London
- Ramsgate
- Isleworth

Belgium

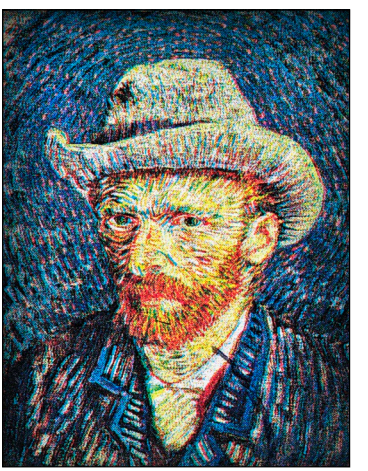
- Brussels
- Borinage
- Antwerp

France

- Arles
- Paris
- Auvers-sur-Oise
- Saint-Rémy



In the Footsteps of Vincent van Gogh



This series is an immersive journey through the life and art of Vincent van Gogh. Through 15 episodes, it will take you through Holland, Belgium, and France in an attempt to unravel the mystery of Vincent's astonishing career. Unlike other artists of his time, Vincent could never be tied to a single location. His art thrived on the frantic movement from one place to the next, each of which would leave an indelible stamp on his work. As soon as he exhausted the motifs of the world around him, he became restless, ready to move on and see other undiscovered lands. Throughout his career as an artist, Vincent never stayed in one house or location for more than two years. He always yearned for what lay beyond the horizon, eager to find out whether it would fulfill his dreams.

As the series retraces Vincent's wanderings, you will travel from The Hague in the north of Holland to the towns of Etten and Nuenen in Brabant; from the port of Antwerp in Belgium to Paris and Montmartre, the mecca of 19th-

century art; and to Arles, in the heart of Provence, where you will reconstruct the Yellow House that Vincent hoped would one day become a new Studio of the South. Then, the series visits the asylum of Saint-Rémy—a place that amazingly still exists to this day—where Vincent was admitted after he cut his ear. Finally, you'll visit the lovely village of Auvers-sur-Oise, just outside of Paris, where he spent the final months of his life.

As you travel across Europe, you will be guided by Vincent himself through his letters to his brother Theo as well as the letters and memoirs of fellow artists, his family, and the friends he met along the way. These letters offer an unprecedented and nearly day-by-day record of Vincent's mental, emotional, and creative development during his career as an artist, from 1880 to 1890. You will also meet with curators of today's leading collections of Vincent's art.

Even though Vincent is today one of the world's most famous modern artists, there is so much that we don't know. What was it that drove Vincent's fantastic output—an oeuvre of some 860 paintings and more than 1,000 drawings, all produced in the span of less than 10 years? And why did he decide on a career as an artist after he first worked as a Protestant missionary in some of the poorest regions of northern Europe? What was the secret of his unique and highly personal style, which is instantly recognizable to anyone with only a passing knowledge of art? Is there a link between the swirling stars and fiery cypresses of his Saint-Rémy period and the mental illness that confined him to an asylum? And what drove him, on that beautiful day in July of 1890, to take his pistol and turn it on himself? These are some of the mysteries that this series will attempt to unravel as you walk in the footsteps of Vincent van Gogh.

The World of Vincent van Gogh

Auvers-sur-Oise

» Auvers-sur-Oise is a village located some 20 miles northwest of Paris, in the Val-d'Oise, or valley of the Oise River. This region, with its bucolic fields and quaint little villages, attracted French artists such as Corot, Daubigny, Pissarro, and Cézanne. They practiced a new form of art: painting in plein air—in the full light of the sun—rather than the darkness of an artist's studio.

» For the Dutch artist Vincent Willem van Gogh, nature was a living source of inspiration. Even though some of his best works involve portraiture, it is the landscape that propelled Vincent's development and enabled him to create some of his boldest and most imaginative works.

The Auberge Ravoux

» On July 27, 1890, Vincent left his attic room at the Auberge Ravoux in Auvers-sur-Oise. He seemed blind to the history and beauty of the village that had made such an impression on him when he'd arrived there 70 days earlier. Instead, he passed the town hall that he had sketched in one of his drawings just a few weeks before. Unbeknown to people who passed him on the street, he was carrying a revolver. The innkeeper, Ravoux, had given it to him after Vincent said he needed something to scare off the crows while painting in the fields.

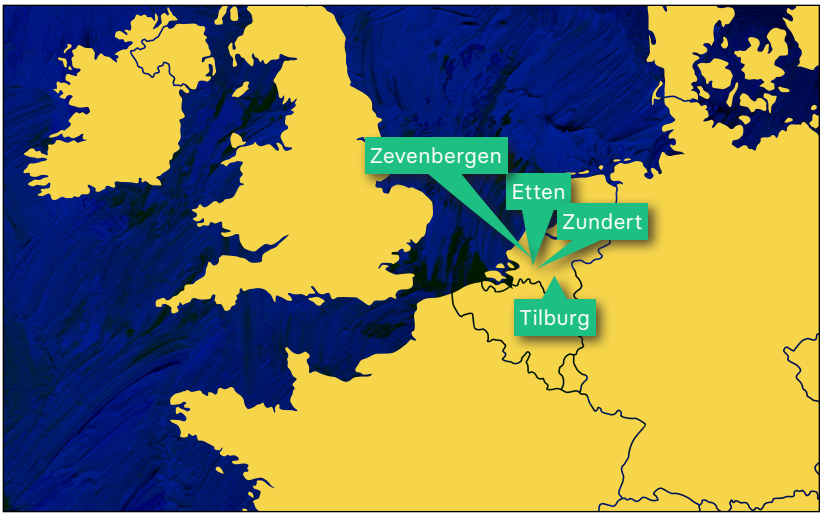
» Around 3:00 pm that Sunday afternoon, Vincent walked to the fields behind the Auvers-sur-Oise cemetery and shot himself. Amazingly, he managed to make his way back to the Auberge Ravoux, where he climbed the stairs to his attic and collapsed on his bed. There he died, some 30 hours later, with his brother Theo by his side. Today, the old cemetery of Auvers-sur-Oise is located at the very end of what is now called the rue Émile Bernard. Here, in a simple grave, is Vincent's final resting place.

Zundert

» In many ways, it's in another cemetery that the story of Vincent van Gogh begins. In the cemetery of the Dutch town Zundert is another grave with the remains of Vincent Willem van Gogh. But this is actually Vincent's older brother, a stillborn baby who died on March 30, 1852. One year later to the day, on March 30, 1853, a second boy was born, and he was named after the first.

» For the next 11 years, the village of Zundert was Vincent's home. Here, he would grow up surrounded by the fields and pastures of a region called Brabant. It was a rural culture, almost entirely devoted to growing crops and tending to livestock, while the rest of Holland slowly embraced the Industrial Revolution. It was a quiet life but not without some profound tensions.

Early Years in Brabant



Zundert

» Most of the old Brabant is gone now. Zundert, the village where Vincent spent the first 11 years of his life, is now called Groot-Zundert, or Great Zundert. It's a large town and a major center of Dutch agriculture. But some monuments from Vincent's time still remain. One of these is a rather imposing 19th-century city hall, where Vincent's birth was registered in March of 1853. Another monument is the church where Vincent's father served as the pastor. The small structure, built in 1806, catered to a tiny minority of Protestants in an overwhelmingly Catholic region.

» As the oldest son, Vincent was a bit spoiled, and he was known to have a temper. That didn't improve when the family continued to grow. The small parsonage where they lived became quite cramped. The roof had a sharp pitch, which meant the upper bedrooms were narrow and had a sloped ceiling. The crowded conditions instilled a lifelong yearning for solitude in Vincent—to be by himself, curled up with a book or a drawing pad.

Zevenbergen

» When he was seven years old, Vincent was sent to the local village school. Most of the children were Catholic farm boys who had little in common with this bookish son of the Protestant pastor. So, when Vincent was 11, he was enrolled in a private Protestant boarding school in Zevenbergen, some 16 miles away. That meant that Vincent had to live at the school, except for holidays. Before long, he realized how much he missed the homey life of Zundert.

» The boarding school still exists today. In Vincent's time, it had just 19 pupils, all from well-to-do Dutch Reformed families. Even though Vincent didn't like it, the school made one great impact that would become important in his later life: It taught him foreign languages. He was drilled in French and English every week, which years later would enable him to speak and write in amazingly fluent French.

Tilburg

» When he was 13 years old, Vincent went on to what today we would call high school. Located in the city of Tilburg, in the heart of Brabant, this was an establishment named after the reigning monarch, William II. The school was actually built as one of the king's palaces, but he died before it was finished, and it was turned into a secondary school.

» The place was a breath of fresh air for Vincent. In addition to teaching foreign languages, the school had art classes led by a well-established artist named Constant Huijsmans. It was Vincent's very first art class, and he was riveted. Vincent was certainly in his element, which is why it's so surprising that after less than two years, he suddenly returned home to Zundert and decided to put an end to his schooling.

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The Turn toward Art

The Hague

» Today, the city of The Hague forms part of a vast urban area called the Randstad, which also includes Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. But the heart of the city—the area around the Parliament buildings, known as the Binnenhof—still retains much of the elegance and refinement of the Dutch 19th century. This is the seat not only of the government but also of the Dutch monarchy, founded in 1815.

» Vincent's favorite uncle, Uncle Cent, worked as an art dealer in The Hague. His shop was located on a square called the Plaats, and it was the primary source of art reproductions in Holland. In time, the business merged with Goupil in Paris, and together they became a leading source of art and reproductions throughout Europe. At the invitation of his uncle, Vincent traveled to The Hague and became an employee of Goupil in 1869.

The Borinage and Cuesmes

» A model employee, Vincent was rewarded with a posting to Goupil's branch in London. He flourished there for some time, but after facing rejection from the woman he loved, he became sullen and withdrawn. In 1876, he was dismissed from the firm. Vincent seemed to live in a wilderness of his own making for the next four years. He became increasingly preoccupied with religious ideas, setting his mind to becoming a missionary. In 1879, he took up a post in the bleakest part of Belgium: the mining region of the Borinage. But even before his six-month contract was up, he was told it would not be renewed.

» Wandering through Belgium, Vincent wound up in the town of Cuesmes. And it is here, in the summer of 1880, that he found a new purpose in life. He began to make drawings of the people and views of the local town. His brother Theo was so impressed that he suggested that Vincent should perhaps become an artist. At long last, it seemed that Vincent had found his true vocation.

Schenkweg 138

» Vincent knew that his drawing technique still lacked the finesse and confidence of professional artists. After a stay at his parents' home in Etten, he moved back to The Hague in late 1881 and became an apprentice of his cousin-in-law, Anton Mauve. Though he was a man of limited talent and artistic reach, it was Mauve who introduced Vincent to the essential techniques of drawing and painting in watercolor and oils. In 1882, Vincent rented a room in a house just outside the city, at Schenkweg 138. It would become his very first studio.

» One of Vincent's most successful attempts during this period is a stunning painting titled *Girl in White in the Woods.* This was the first time he was able to buy his own oil paints, thanks to funds remitted by Theo. The low

perspective suggests that Vincent painted it on his knees—in fact, pieces of oak leaves have been found in the pigments. Even Vincent was somewhat surprised by the rapid improvement of his art, writing, "I don't know exactly how I paint it. I see that Nature has told me something, has spoken to me, and that I've captured it in shorthand."

Drenthe

» After causing a scandal by moving in with an alcoholic prostitute named Sien, Vincent retreated into the remote northeastern province of Drenthe. Here, he focused on drawing and painting the thatched cottages and dark heath in morose, monochrome colors. This probably reflected his mood, as he was racked by guilt over leaving Sien and her children.

» His confidence in his art was growing, but the same could not be said for his mood, which wasn't helped by the dark skies of Drenthe in winter. After falling into a depression, Vincent had only one option: to swallow his pride and return to the house of his parents—this time in the Brabant village of Nuenen. And it is here that Vincent would finally hit his stride as a painter.

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The Nuenen Period

The Vicarage

» Vincent's father, Dorus, was once more assigned to a place in the heart of the devoutly Catholic south, this time in the modest Protestant community of Nuenen, a mere five miles from the city of Eindhoven. At that time, Nuenen was a village of some 2,500 souls. The vicarage looked rather impressive from the outside, but it was actually in bad repair. And the church was only about the size of a small chapel.

» Dorus allowed Vincent to make the small extension at the back of the house his apartment and studio. It had always served as the mangle room, where wet laundry was fed into a wringer and household linens were pressed. There was no heating in this room, and given the Dutch climate, it was often damp and cold. Dorus was kind enough to get Vincent a stove, but he couldn't fix the fact that the room was next to the outhouse and the sump, with the inevitable smell that these facilities produced.

Nuenen Architecture

» Fortunately, the studio looked out over the back garden, with a view of the tower of the old church of Nuenen in the distance. For the next two years, Vincent would document this garden in a number of paintings and drawings. And, somewhat to his surprise, Vincent actually began to like Nuenen.

» One of the first paintings Vincent did in Nuenen was of his father's chapel, not far from the parsonage. Amazingly, it still stands to this day, in a setting that has changed little from the 19th century. This painting is now lost, but in October of 1884, Vincent returned to the motif once more, painting his father's church in the colors of fall.

» Another motif that fascinated Vincent was the watermill. Then and now, Holland is covered with countless waterways, all of which are a potential source of energy. In Brabant, watermills were used to crush corn and grain or to cut and saw lumber. Vincent was struck by the majesty of the slow-turning wheel and the way in which watermills blended seamlessly with nature.

The Schafrat Studio

» Vincent's output grew so much that he often worked on several paintings at once. The canvases began to stack up, and Vincent realized he needed a bigger studio. In May of 1884, he found a perfect room, which was owned by the Catholic sexton Johannes Schafrat. But after another doomed romantic connection as well as the death of his father, Vincent became a pariah.

» Vincent was soon working on another motif: portraits. He set out to create a series of 50 portraits of peasants in and around Nuenen. The idea may have been suggested by his friend, van Rappard, who believed that Vincent needed more formal training. Vincent was intrigued by the idea, and he may have launched the portrait studies to improve his technique in drawing from life.

The De Groot Cottage

» Vincent's powerful series of portraits, so expressive of the toil and hardship of peasant life, prepared him for his first masterpiece: *The Potato Eaters*. The idea came to him after visiting the De Groot-van Rooij family, who had just sat down to share a bowl of boiled potatoes for dinner.

» The scene summarized everything Vincent had been trying to capture over the preceding months: the simple, impoverished lifestyle of the Dutch peasantry; their gnarled, weather-beaten physique; and their strong attachment to the earth. He made several studies of the scene on site and then painted the full-size version in his studio.

» But the mood in the village had turned against Vincent, and the pastor of the local Catholic church forbade his parishioners to sit for this wild Protestant artist. Deprived of his pool of models, Vincent had no reason to hang around Nuenen any longer. He planned to go to Antwerp, just as van Rappard had suggested, to receive formal training and begin a new chapter in his career as an artist.

Vincent in Antwerp

The Grote Markt

» Though only a two-hour train ride away, Antwerp was very different from the towns and villages of Brabant. It had become very wealthy in the early Renaissance with its overseas trade, making it the leading financial center of Europe. On any given day, as many as 100 ships would pass through its port. But things started to change in the early 16th century, primarily as the result of the growing tensions between the Protestant north and the Catholic south, which ultimately produced the Eighty Years' War.

» By the end of 1885, when Vincent arrived, Antwerp had lost much of its trade to other European ports. But it was still a vibrant city, as illustrated by its magnificent Grote Markt, or Great Market Square. Just as it is today, the Grote Markt was renowned for its cuisine and rowdy nightlife. All of this must have been a fascinating experience for Vincent, especially after living among the peasants of Brabant for two years.

The Lange Beeldekensstraat

» Vincent found lodgings in the upper room of a house on the Lange Beeldekensstraat, or the Long Street of Images. He was eager to begin painting from life, but unfortunately, half of his monthly allowance was used for rent. He therefore had a choice: He could eat, or he could pay models to sit for him. Of course, Vincent chose the latter. As soon as he received his brother Theo's monthly envelope with money, he "set out at once to hunt for models."

» In a port like Antwerp, his choice of models consisted of the city's prostitutes. He must have slept with at least one of these women, because he soon fell ill and was diagnosed with syphilis. There was no real treatment for the condition at the time, and on top of that, he lost several of his front teeth due to rotting. All this may explain why Vincent's self-portrait, painted later that year, shows what appears to be an old man, even though he was only 32 at the time.

The Antwerp Art Academy

» Vincent finally began his art classes in January 1886. The academy was located in a neoclassical structure designed by the French architect Pierre Bourla in 1841. It still stands today at the corner of the Blindestraat and the Mutsaardstraat, a mere 10-minute walk from the city's center.

» The academy was an old institution. It was founded in 1663, shortly after the conclusion of the Eighty Years' War, which made it the fourth-oldest academy of its kind in Europe. Perhaps because of its hallowed history, it was not known for its modernist sympathies. The curriculum focused on the established canons of academic art, paramount among them the dry, historical reenactments of Henri Leys, the most influential Belgian painter of the time.

» As the classes began, Vincent found himself in a room with some 60 students who were tasked to paint from life—in this case, two wrestlers posing on a platform. A witness, the artist Victor Hageman, recalled that Vincent "painted feverishly, furiously, and laid on so much impasto that his colors literally dripped from the canvas onto the floor." The academy's director, Charles Verlat, was deeply disturbed by this performance. He dismissed Vincent, sending him off to the drawing class—a classroom for beginners.

The Gold Shop

» Vincent was still desperate to work from living models. He decided to join a group of students who pooled their money to pay for a model willing to pose in the nude. The prudish academy forbade the use of nude models, but every aspiring artist knew that mastering the female form was the ultimate challenge. Under cover of darkness, they met in a room called the Gold Shop on Antwerp's Great Market Square. This is where Vincent was able to draw a full-length nude for the first time.

» This drawing demonstrated how much Vincent had advanced in a short period of time. But when one of his teachers at the academy saw the nude drawing, the teacher took it and tore it up. That was practically the end of Vincent's stay in Antwerp. For some time now, he'd believed that he was ready for the mecca of modern art: Paris.

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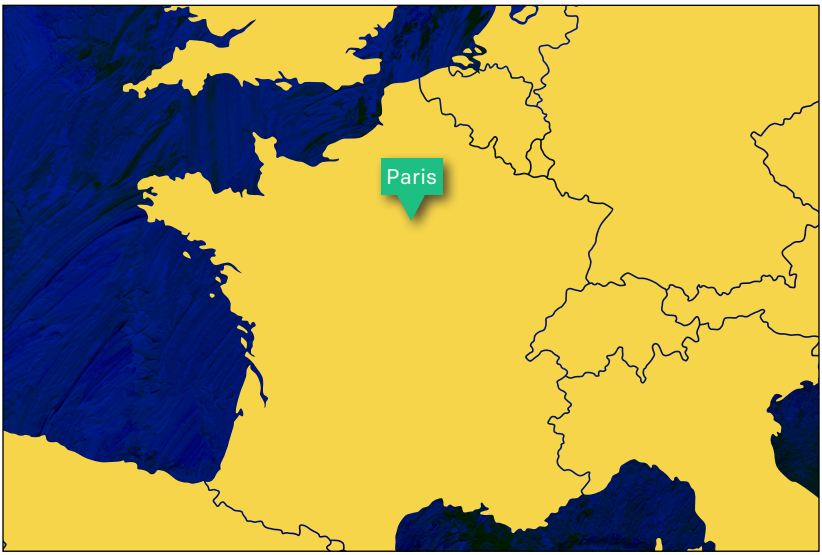
The Paris Art Scene in the 1880s



Montmartre

» Like Vincent, Theo had also worked for Goupil at The Hague branch. But unlike Vincent, he stuck with it and steadily rose through the ranks. In 1881, he was appointed director of the Montmartre branch—an astounding promotion for a 24-year-old. This gave him a modest but stable income that allowed him to support Vincent in his struggle to become a professional artist. Theo secured a small apartment on the rue Laval and became a regular patron of the Chat Noir, the café that served as the unofficial headquarters of avant-garde movements in Paris.

» In 1879, Theo attended the fourth impressionist exhibition, which in many ways was a turning point. He sensed right away that the public reception of their work was far more positive than it had been in years past, which meant that impressionism could become an attractive business opportunity. His senior partners at Goupil were not convinced, but Theo persevered and was finally given permission to use the upper floor of his

Montmartre branch to display impressionist paintings. It's safe to say that Theo became a key figure in the late impressionist movement, which in turn would give Vincent a privileged entrée into this circle.

La Nouvelle Athènes

» The impressionists were never a cohesive group, just as their approach to impressionism differed in many ways. Perhaps the only thing they had in common was an interest in the modern cityscape of Paris rather than the historical subjects favored by academic artists.

» In 1853, Napoleon III had charged Baron Haussmann to turn Paris into a modern city of wide boulevards and uniform rows of classical facades. His vision would make Paris the beautiful city that we know today. Of course, it also raised the property values and sent rents skyrocketing, which is why many artists sought refuge in the northern part of the city, known as the Batignolles. This district still offered a sense of intimacy. Here were the cafés where the impressionists met on Thursdays to debate their ideas. A café called la Nouvelle Athènes was the headquarters of the impressionist movement.

Bazille's Studio

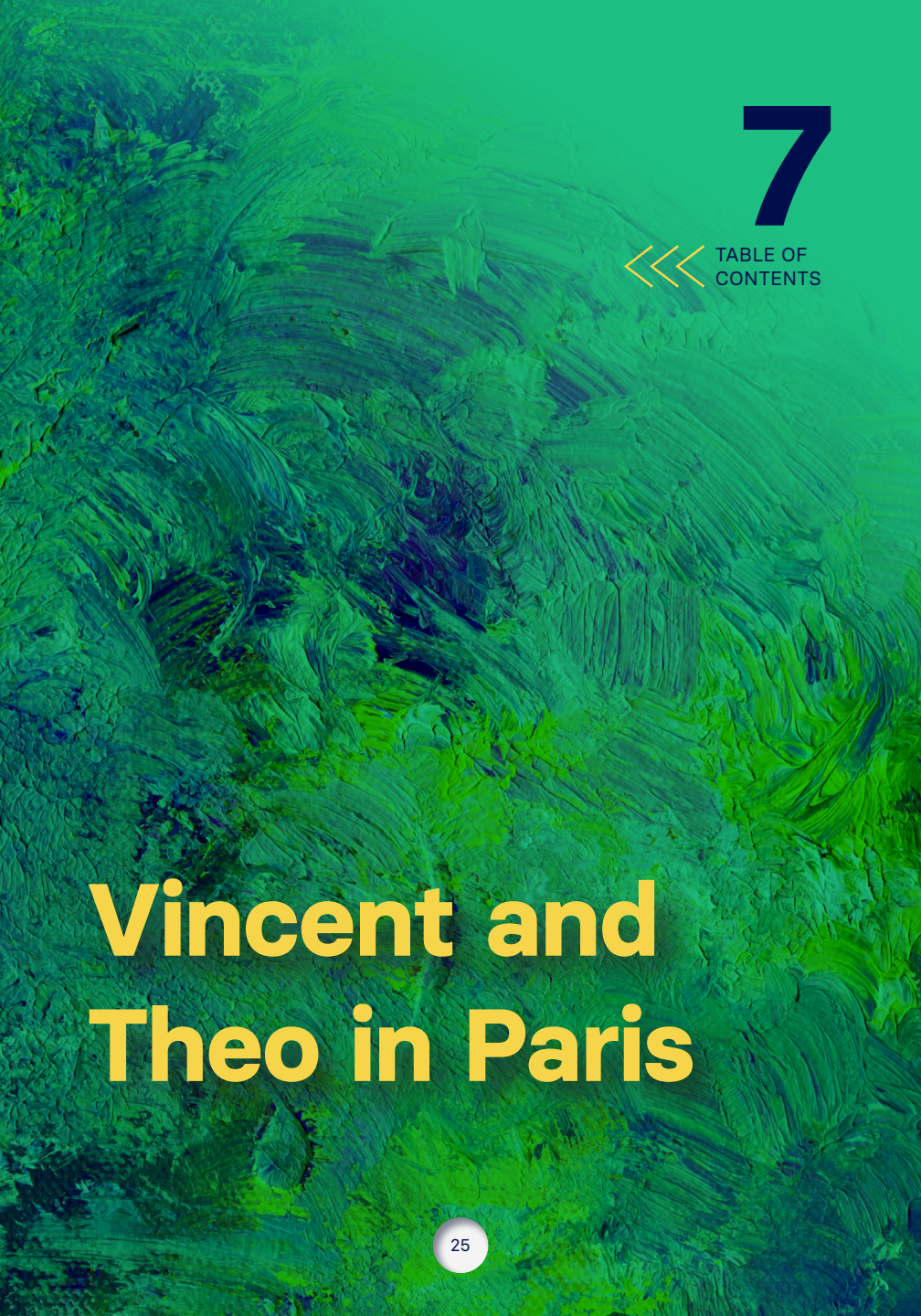
» The impressionists didn't agree on much, but they did agree on their debt to Édouard Manet. His daring choice of modern subject matter and bravura brushwork, which was so different from the painful realism of academic painters, endeared Manet to the budding group of impressionists. The Batignolles group also included artists like Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, who had taken their easels out of the studio and were now painting in plein air. Thanks to Monet, the outdoor visual experience became one of the doctrines of the impressionist movement.

» Inevitably, the impressionist painters gravitated toward each other with the idea of hosting joint exhibitions. They also needed a place to get together and discuss their work without the distractions of a café. Frédéric Bazille, a lesser-known impressionist painter, hailed from an affluent family with vineyards down south, near Montpellier. He decided to rent a big studio, located in the rue de la Condamine, just off the boulevard de Clichy. Bazille paid the rent while Monet and others came to drink, argue, and have a good time.

Manet's Apartment

» Another famous hangout was Manet's apartment on the rue de Saint-Pétersbourg. It was in this house that the artist Henri Fantin-Latour painted what would become the official portrait of the gang of the Batignolles, with Manet at their center. The artists depicted include Auguste Renoir, Émile Zola, Claude Monet, and Frédéric Bazille, towering above all the others.

» This painting was the high mark of the impressionist movement. The group of artists would become the wellspring of modern art, even though they were still struggling to have their works sold. In fact, one of the few art dealers who was willing to exhibit their paintings was none other than Theo van Gogh.



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Vincent and Theo in Paris

The Rue Lepic Apartment

» On February 28, 1886, Vincent boarded a train to Paris without telling Theo what he was up to. Theo had rebuffed the idea that Vincent should join him in Paris, afraid that they would drive each other up a wall if they were forced to live in such a cramped space. But Vincent was convinced that his salvation as an artist lay in Paris. When Theo received a message that Vincent had arrived at the Gare du Nord railway station, he had no choice but to do as his brother's message asked and meet up with Vincent at the Louvre.

» Theo and Vincent moved into a new apartment on the rue Lepic in June. It was much larger than the place on the rue Laval, which made their living arrangements somewhat easier. It was a comfortable place, with three large rooms, a bathroom, and a kitchen. Vincent even had his own studio. This new apartment placed the two brothers into the very center of French modern art.

The Moulin de la Galette

» Paris had a lot to offer—particularly in the district of Montmartre, which had a reputation for bawdy shows. One venue, the Moulin de la Galette, was just a short walk from Theo's new apartment. This was the principal destination for young lovers to go and have a good time on its outdoor dance floor. It was also an irresistible motif for the impressionists, since it offered urban subjects in a setting full of light, color, and movement. Renoir was among the first to discover the scene, and he captured the excitement of these young people enjoying themselves in the dappled light of the sun.

» Some months later, Vincent made a whole series of studies and paintings of the scene. Whereas his earlier versions of the Moulin de la Galette still used the dark, muted colors of his Dutch period, his palette began to

brighten under influence of the impressionist works he must have seen in Paris galleries. These paintings also show that, unlike today, the Moulin de la Galette still stood alone at the top of the hill, surrounded by green fields.

La Butte Montmartre

» This area, called la Butte Montmartre—or Montmartre Hill—was almost a community unto itself. One reason was that horse-drawn cabs could not come up all the way because the steep incline of the streets was too hard on the horses. The area therefore had its own food market, which, amazingly, still exists today. Here, Vincent could rub shoulders with any number of important people, including the art dealer Alphonse Portier, who also lived in Theo's new building. He sold the work of Pissarro, Renoir, and Cézanne. Or Vincent may have run into Renoir himself, whose studio was just up the road.

» Because of its high elevation, the Butte Montmartre offered spectacular views of the city of Paris. This was bound to attract a whole host of artists, including Alfred Sisley, Camille Pissarro, and Armand Guillaumin. Vincent himself sketched the view from the very summit of Montmartre. Today, you still have much the same view, if you can blot out the high-rises in the distance. For example, you can see the top of the famous Opéra that features so prominently in Vincent's drawing.

Julien Tanguy's Shop

» Vincent devoted himself to exploring the city and the works of impressionists. And indeed, he was making new friends. One of the places where all the artists would meet up was the paint shop of Julien Tanguy, located on the rue Clauzel. He was better known as Père Tanguy, or Father Tanguy, because of his role as the patron saint of hopeless causes—in this case, these painters who couldn't sell their works if their lives depended on it. Tanguy was always ready to provide a canvas, some brushes, or some paint, even if the buyer in question did not have any cash. In that case, he would simply accept some of the artist's works as payment.

» It seemed like an idyllic period in Vincent's life, but his hard-headed character got in the way. He never stopped complaining about Theo's inability to sell his paintings, even though he knew that Theo had a hard time selling the work of far more prominent artists, such as Monet, Renoir, or Pissarro. Theo was under growing pressure to show some results with these modern works, and it certainly didn't help that when he came home, exhausted from the stress, he had to put up with Vincent's ill-tempered lectures.

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Vincent and the Post-Impressionists

La Maison Dorée

» The 1870s were the high mark of impressionism. But in the decade that followed, the impressionists gradually drifted apart. Bazille died in the Franco-Prussian War, and Manet passed away in 1883. Some began to look for new directions in the study of light, color, and asymmetrical composition. Others backed away from the illusion of three-dimensional realism and searched for more symbolic or even more abstract qualities in their art. Art historians refer to this next phase as post-impressionism.

» Some artists decided to push the impressionist use of color to its extreme. Georges Seurat felt that the study of visual perception should be based on science—for example, the discovery that light actually consists of a spectrum of colors. The result was a theory called divisionism, better known today as pointillism—the idea of painting tiny spots of complementary colors that would coalesce in the human brain and produce the dynamic effect of the outdoors.

» Vincent first encountered pointillism in 1886, when he visited the eighth impressionist exhibition in the galleries above la Maison Dorée, located at the intersection of the boulevard des Italiens and the rue Laffitte. The exhibit was dominated by Seurat's masterpiece, *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte,* or *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. Vincent experimented with pointillist technique in his *Interior of a Restaurant.*

Asnières and Louveciennes

» For Vincent, encountering so many different modern ideas must have been overwhelming. He launched into a rapid series of color canvases that each sampled, and then discarded, the many styles he came into contact with.

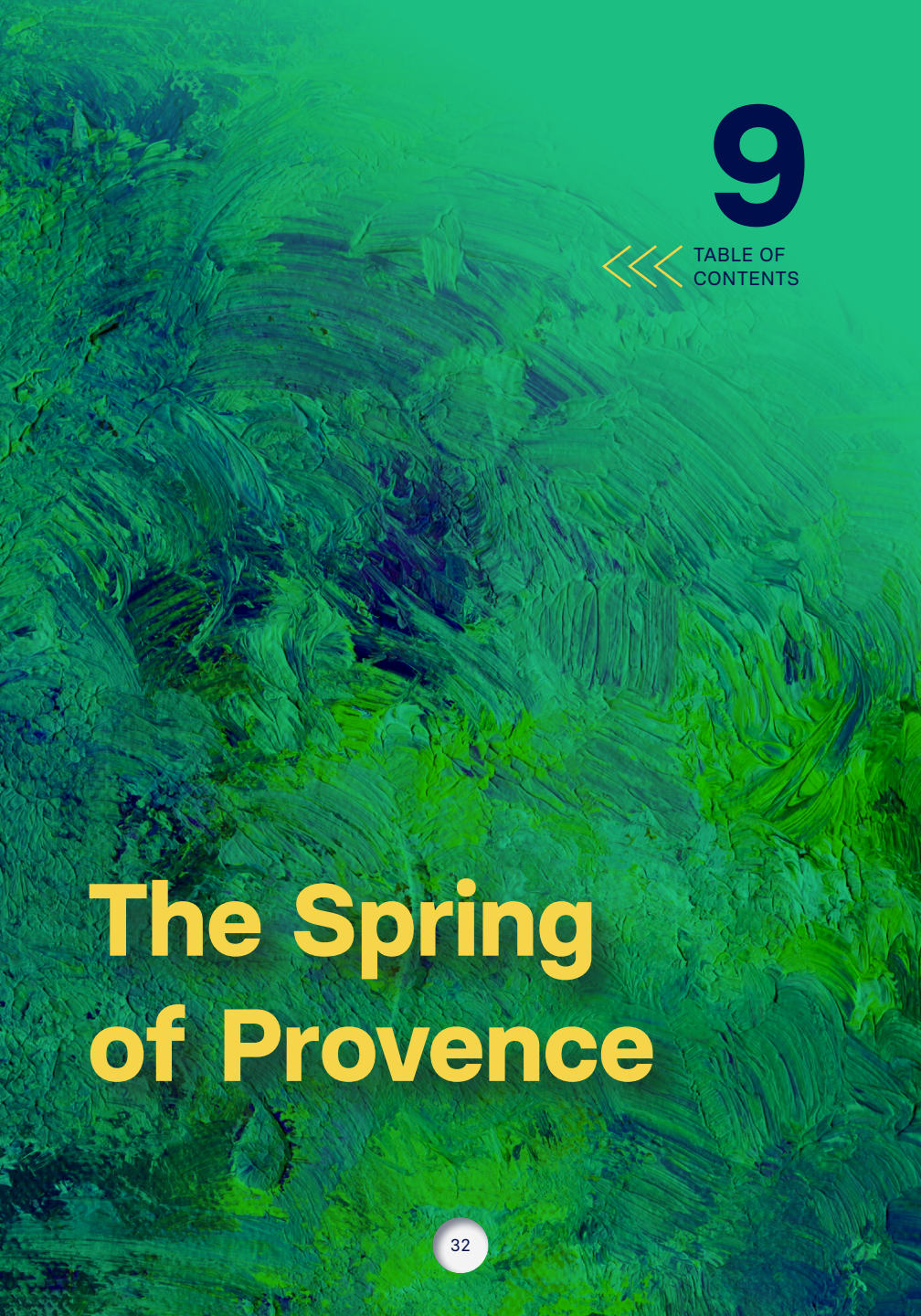
» For much of 1886, Vincent had worked in and around Montmartre. But in 1887, he walked in the footsteps of Renoir and Monet to the outlying villages along the Seine, such as Asnières and Louveciennes. Along the way, Vincent became close friends with several post-impressionists who would become quite prominent in their own right, including Émile Bernard, Paul Gauguin, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Le Tambourin

» Vincent had also developed a new love interest: a soft-hearted Italian woman named Agostina Segatori, who had posed for Corot and Degas, among others. She was the owner of a restaurant cabaret called le Tambourin, located on the boulevard de Clichy, and she often allowed starving artists to exhibit there. Many of Vincent's Paris canvases were exhibited for the first time on the walls of this tiny bistro, side by side with the works of his new friends. This is where Toulouse-Lautrec painted Vincent in profile as he sat at a table, nursing a pint of beer.

» Segatori seemed quite taken with Vincent. She first appears in a portrait dated to February or March 1887, nursing a cigarette at one of her tambourine tables. Shortly thereafter, she agreed to have Vincent stage an exhibit of his beloved Japanese prints. He also decorated her restaurant with his still lifes of flowers, hoping that someone might buy them.

» But the affair couldn't last, of course. When Vincent's legendary moods became too much for her, she broke up with him in mid-July of 1887. Vincent decided he'd had enough of Paris. He had learned all he could from the plethora of styles and techniques that his fellow artists were experimenting with, and he now needed a quiet place to begin crafting a uniquely personal style. He remembered that Toulouse-Lautrec had often talked about his idyllic childhood in the South of France, so Vincent went south, to a city called Arles.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La Crau

» Vincent arrived in Arles on the morning of February 20, 1888. Tubes of paint and canvases were not easy to come by in Arles, so Vincent eventually returned to the basic elements of drawing, without any of the pressures of impressionist theory. The temporary shortage of oil paint may have been a blessing. With these drawings, Vincent created the foundation for a new form of art that was truly his own.

» A turning point in Vincent's art came when he heard of the ruins of a large monastery on a hill outside Arles. The Abbey of St. Peter in Montmajour was originally a Benedictine monastery, built in the 10th century on a high hill overlooking the marshes. Over the centuries, the building was expanded until it was partly destroyed during the French Revolution of 1789. The impressive ruins still exist today.

» What struck Vincent about this place was not so much the monastery itself but rather the high vantage point from which he could see the surrounding fields—just as in the Japanese prints he so admired. This area was called la Crau, and it is here that Vincent produced one of the first paintings of his mature style.

Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer

» Vincent's mature style began to assert itself even more clearly over the next few weeks. On May 30, he traveled by horse-drawn carriage to the seaside village of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. Vincent was fascinated by the sea, as witnessed by his early paintings of the beach of Scheveningen.

» Here, Vincent captured a key work from his Arles period, titled *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*. It began with a drawing that he executed very early in the morning, just before he was scheduled to go back to Arles. He had to make haste, not only to catch his carriage back to the city but also because the fishermen were about to push off with their nets once more.

» Back in Arles, Vincent translated the drawing onto a canvas. The fussiness of his fruit trees in spring, which still reflected the influence of impressionism, is now gone. Instead, Vincent is an artist in full command of his vision.

The Yellow House

» All this frantic activity brought home the fact that Vincent needed a larger space to work in. Fortunately, as he roamed through the city, he found a place for rent that was perfect. It stood on the Place Lamartine, close to the railway station. It was not necessarily the best area in town, and the

place needed a lot of work. But Vincent didn't mind, particularly since it was cheap and it faced a pretty park that he would paint in the months to come.

» Unfortunately, the house that would play such a key role in Vincent's second act is no longer standing. It was already in bad repair when, during World War II, the second floor was heavily damaged by a stray bomb. Few people in the city knew of the house's pivotal importance in the life of Vincent van Gogh, so it was torn down after the war.

» Fortunately, Vincent has painted it for us. He called it the Yellow House because of the yellow cast of its walls. And while the Yellow House itself is gone, all of the surrounding buildings are still intact, including the large hotel just behind it and the railway bridge at the end of the street. Vincent's move to the Yellow House began a new phase in his life and the classical period of his art.

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Vincent's Classical Period

Café de la Gare

» In the summer of 1888, the Yellow House became Vincent's studio in Provence. But he couldn't sleep there yet because he didn't have the money to buy a bed. Instead, he found a room above the Café de la Gare, located just a few doors down. It was a friendly bar that stayed open all night to cater to travelers and train crews from the railway station nearby.

» The café was managed by a couple named Joseph and Marie Ginoux. Many patrons actually spent the night there, sleeping at their table, but the Ginoux family didn't mind. In September, Vincent painted the interior of the café, with Monsieur Ginoux standing next to the pool table. As the clock shows, it is just past midnight, and the few people in the room are either sleeping or whispering in the corner.

The Yellow House

» After two years of living in Paris with Theo and friends, Vincent felt lonely. He began thinking about creating a Studio of the South, in the same way that Bernard, Gauguin, and others had developed their Pont-Aven school in Brittany. To kickstart this new group, Vincent hoped that one of his friends in Paris would join him. It would allow him to split the rent, thus leaving more money for paint, wine, and food. And more importantly, it would give him someone with whom to debate the big issues of modern art.

» Theo suggested to Paul Gauguin that he join his brother in the south, even though Vincent and Gauguin were not particularly close. But Theo felt that they could help each other, not only socially and financially but also in creative terms, since they were both on the cusp of creating an entirely new form of art. That summer of 1888, they were both reaching a level of

maturity that would produce their signature styles: Vincent with *Harvest in Provence* and *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*, and Gauguin with his *Vision after the Sermon*.

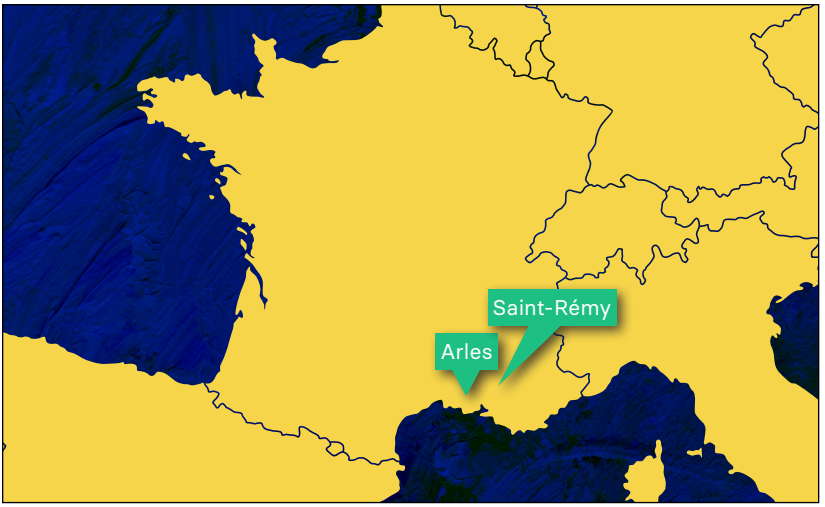
» Vincent fussed over the interior of the Yellow House to make sure everything was ready for Gauguin's arrival. He had finally saved up enough money to buy a bed for himself and one for the guest room. He designated the ground floor as his studio because it had the biggest windows. In the back was a small kitchen, which he used to store his canvases. He was so proud that he documented this newly decorated interior in some of his most famous works. Here, for the first time, was a place he could call his own.

Place du Forum

» Days were filled with work, but at night, Vincent often gravitated to the Place du Forum, the square in the heart of the city. He was often joined by others who drank the night away. In September, he made a drawing of the scene and then took it back to the Yellow House to develop it into a painting. We are used to seeing our cities lit up, so it's difficult to imagine the wonder of seeing a café illuminated by gaslight at night. For Vincent's contemporaries, a scene such as this was nothing short of magical.

» Walking around Arles at night, Vincent was also drawn to the banks of the Rhône, just a short walk from the Yellow House. On the east side of the river was a gentle curve in the embankment that allowed the streetlights to be reflected in the water. Vincent captured the atmosphere of a Provençal night with a rich variety of blues and purples. Both of these paintings show how Vincent was beginning to use a combination of primary colors to express an emotion. That would become a fundamental element of the next stage in his artistic career.

The Studio of the South



The Yellow House

» On October 23, 1888, a train pulled into the station at Arles, carrying the much-anticipated new member of the Studio of the South: Paul Gauguin. Vincent was excited and took him straightaway to the Yellow House. But Gauguin's reaction was not what he expected. His friend was shocked by the mess. There were stacks of canvases everywhere and big splatters of paint. The kitchen had not been cleaned in ages. Gauguin immediately demanded that they hire a cleaner, and Vincent meekly agreed.

» As the weeks wore on, the contrast between Vincent's and Gauguin's temperaments rose to the surface. And nine weeks after Gauguin's arrival, their arguments reached a fever pitch. Gauguin threatened to go back to Paris, which would have put an end to Vincent's dream of creating a Studio of the South. And Vincent's fragile state was aggravated further on December 23, when he received news that Theo planned to get married. Vincent immediately feared that Theo would no longer be able to support him.

» That evening, Vincent and Gauguin had a terrible argument, and Gauguin stormed out of the house. This is the moment when Vincent felt his world was coming apart at the seams. In desperation, he grasped his razor and cut off his left ear. Bleeding heavily, he wrapped the ear in a piece of paper and ran to the local brothel that he and Gauguin used to visit. Perhaps he hoped to find Gauguin there so that he could show him the consequence of his decision to leave. But Gauguin wasn't there, so Vincent gave the gruesome package to a prostitute named Rachel.

The Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Esprit

» By the time police arrived at the Yellow House, Vincent was lying on his bed, his sheets covered in blood. He was immediately taken to the local hospital, the Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Esprit. The physician who was placed in charge of Vincent's care was a 23-year-old intern, Dr. Félix Rey. Mental illness was still a largely undiscovered territory in the medical practice of the time, and Dr. Rey incorrectly diagnosed Vincent's condition as epilepsy—a disorder that would cause intermittent attacks but otherwise allowed the patient to function perfectly well. When Theo arrived, Dr. Rey told him not to worry and that Vincent would be himself again in a few days.

» But Vincent was not well. His world had suddenly shrunk to the walls of this hospital, which gives a special poignancy to his impression of the courtyard, painted in April of 1889. Though it was executed with bright colors and full sunshine, Vincent's mood was dark. On December 29, the chief physician, Dr. Marie Jules Urpar, sent a letter to the mayor of Arles recommending that Vincent be admitted to a special asylum.

Les Baux-de-Provence

» A friendly Protestant pastor, the Reverend Frédéric Salles, came to Vincent's rescue. He knew of a private institution in the nearby town of Saint-Rémy where inmates were treated well. So, on May 8, the reverend took Vincent to the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole.

» Though the distance between Arles and Saint-Rémy is only 27 kilometers, or some 17 miles as the crow flies, the rail line first led to Tarascon and then up to Saint-Rémy-de-Provence through an area called the Alpilles. This is a range of low mountains carved in limestone by thousands of years of wind and erosion. Along the way lies one of the greatest landmarks in this area: the fortified hill of les Baux-de-Provence. This medieval acropolis rises high above the surrounding countryside, offering stunning views of the Alpilles.

» Needless to say, the beauty of this region made a deep impression on Vincent. He was remarkably calm during the journey, and even the arrival at the asylum did not faze him in the least. He sat down and calmly discussed his case with the director, Dr. Théophile Peyron, and then thanked the reverend with a graciousness that impressed everyone present. The reason is simple: Vincent had seen the beautiful landscape and knew that, whatever else would happen here, at least he would be able to paint.

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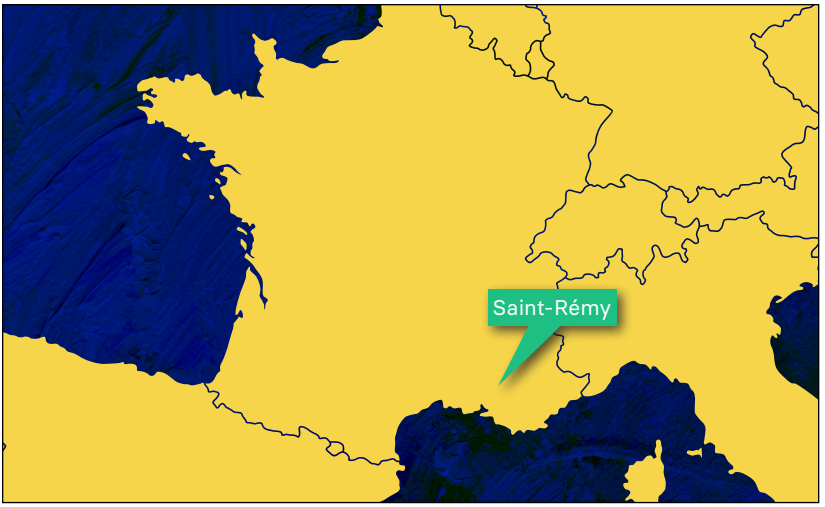
The Asylum at Saint-Rémy



Saint-Rémy

» The town of Saint-Rémy began as the Greco-Roman city Glanum, which was established shortly after Julius Caesar conquered Provence for the Roman Empire. The Roman city was destroyed in 260 CE and was never rebuilt. Instead, the survivors moved a bit north to build a town that eventually became Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. In the 11th century, Augustinian monks built a monastery here. And in the 18th century, the Franciscans converted the building into a convalescent home.

» Even in Roman times, Glanum had a reputation as a wellness resort for both spiritual and physical renewal. In the Middle Ages, it was a pilgrimage destination for the sick. So, the idea of creating an asylum for the mentally ill had a long pedigree. Part of this building still functions as a psychiatric hospital today. Vincent was fortunate to be able to come here because other asylums in France at the time were horrific places where people lived in appalling conditions.

Saint-Paul-de-Mausole

» Of course, the asylum was not luxurious. But only a quarter of the rooms were occupied at the time, and Theo was able to secure two rooms for him: one room to sleep and another to use as a studio. The windows of his room were barred, as in a prison cell, but Vincent only had eyes for the view beyond. In the weeks to come, while he was still confined to the walls of the asylum, it was this view that would captivate him.

» Even if Vincent's condition had been accurately diagnosed, there would not have been a reliable treatment at the time. Instead, he and other patients were treated with hydrotherapy twice a week in both hot and cold water. The bathtubs are still in place today.

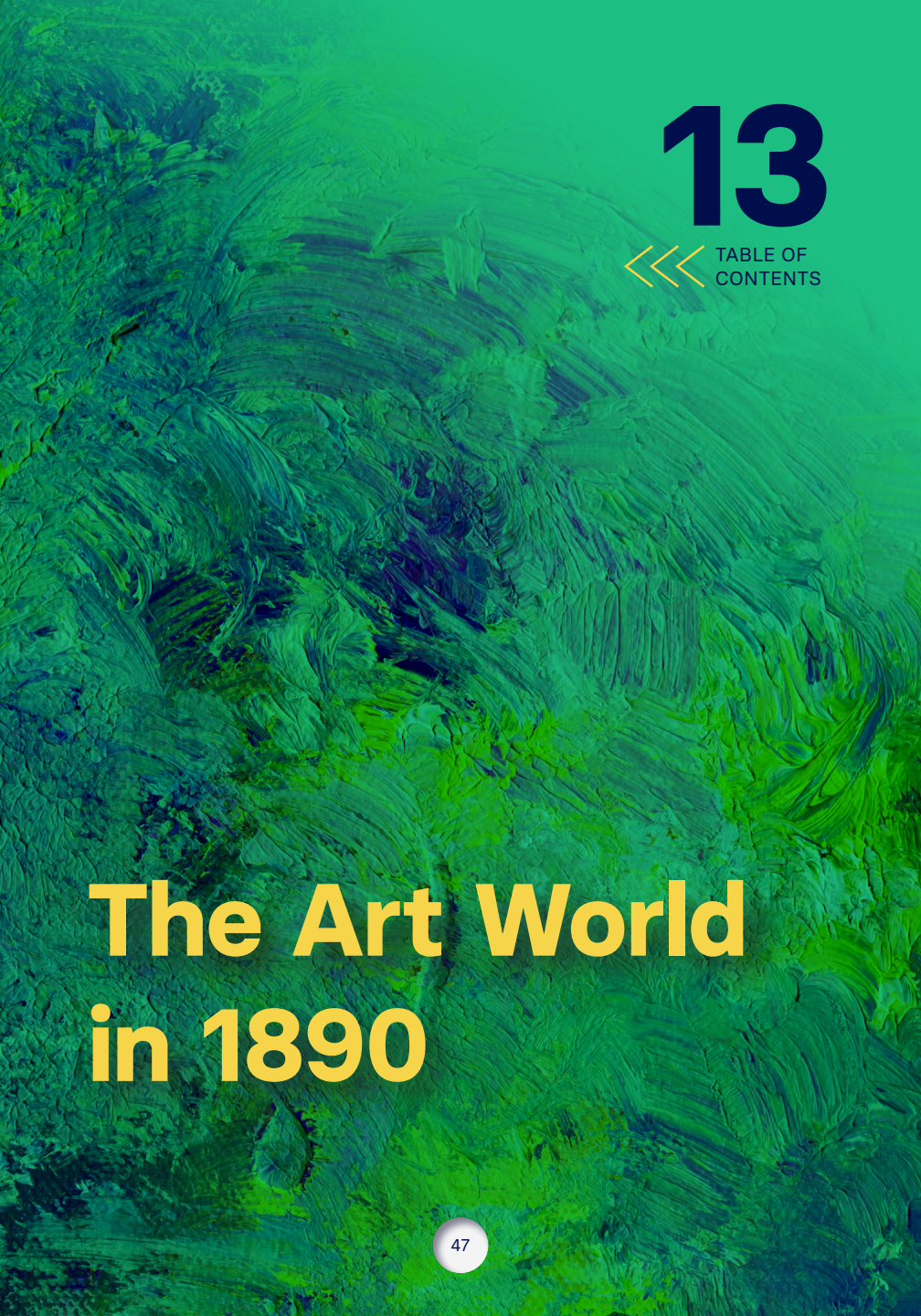
» Eventually, Vincent began to explore the asylum itself, including the long corridors of the monastery and the garden in the courtyard. It is particularly in the studies of irises and plants in the garden that we see a notable shift in Vincent's palette. The exuberant orange and yellows of the Arles period gave way to a greater emphasis on somber colors.

The Wheat Field

» On June 5, the attending physician decided Vincent was well enough to roam freely in the immediate vicinity of the asylum. But time and again, Vincent was drawn to the hypnotic image of a wheat field in an enclosure that he had first seen from his window. He now painted it at eye level.

» When Vincent looked at the landscape, he experienced it as nature in motion, and that is the way he painted it. In fact, it is during this time—on June 18, 1889—that Vincent painted the masterpiece from his Saint-Rémy period, which today is the pride of The Museum of Modern Art in New York: *The Starry Night.*

» Nonetheless, Vincent's mental condition remained fragile, and he suffered four manic attacks. During one such episode in July, he nearly poisoned himself by swallowing his paints. His art betrays the strain, fatigue, and anxiety of this difficult time. It became clear to Vincent that living in this asylum would not offer a cure.



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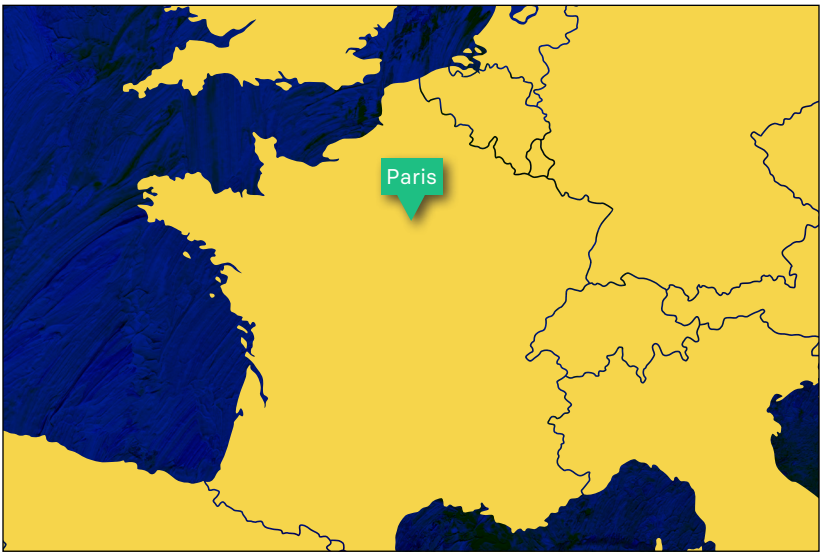

Paris

» In 1890, the art scene of Paris was changing. The annual French Salon remained in thrall of classicist artists like Bouguereau, but in 1890, the Symbolist painter Pierre Puvis de Chavannes was elected president of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, breaking the hold of academic painters on French artistic life. Impressionism had found its way into other genres as well. The idea of evoking moods and emotions through color in music, in the form of chromatic texture and tonal atmosphere, inspired a generation of French composers, including Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Erik Satie.

Brussels

» Another important development was that impressionism was no longer an exclusively French affair. It was adopted in Spain, imperial Russia, Denmark, and the United States. Impressionism and particularly post-impressionism also inspired a group of Belgian painters who called themselves Les Vingt, or The Twenty. From 1883 onward, they organized an annual exhibition in Brussels, and they often invited French artists such as Claude Monet, Georges Seurat, and Camille Pissarro to show their latest work as well.

» On January 17, 1890, their exhibit featured works by not only Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Paul Signac but also six paintings by Vincent van Gogh. The event would go down in history for several reasons, including a minor scandal involving the Belgian artist Henry de Groux. He refused to have his paintings hung next to "the sunflowers of Monsieur Vincent, or of any other agent provocateur." Toulouse-Lautrec defended Vincent, and the argument became so heated that the two artists almost came to blows. Quite suddenly, Vincent had become the most talked-about artist in the show.

8 Cité Pigalle

» It was during this exciting time that Vincent arrived back in Paris on the morning of May 17, 1890. Theo had moved his new family from the rue Lepic to a larger apartment in the Cité Pigalle. He and his wife, Jo, had been busy hanging Vincent's canvases on the wall to make him feel at home. The next few days were a blur as Vincent raced from one gallery to the next to see what had happened in the Paris art scene over the last three years.

» Of course, Vincent couldn't stay at the apartment. Theo had to figure out where Vincent should live and who could keep an eye on him and help him with his recovery. He broached the subject with Camille Pissarro, hoping that Pissarro might invite Vincent to stay at his home in Pontoise. But Pissarro had a better idea.

» There was a doctor in a village near Pontoise named Paul Gachet. As a physician, he had worked at several mental hospitals, and he was also an amateur artist himself and good friends with Pissarro, Renoir, and Cézanne. In short, here was an ideal figure who could take care of Vincent in a medical sense and also encourage and guide him in matters of art. Theo was delighted. The introductions were made, and on May 20, Vincent made the 18-mile trip to Auvers-sur-Oise.

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Vincent in Auvers-sur-Oise

Gachet's Home

» Auvers-sur-Oise in many ways felt like a throwback to another era—a bucolic, medieval village on the banks of the Oise River—and yet it was an easy one-hour train ride from Paris. As soon as the railway link was built, French artists went out to explore the Oise valley, beginning with Camille Corot and Charles-François Daubigny. Camille Pissarro took Paul Cézanne under his wing, and together they painted the quaint streets and homes nestled in the greenery along the banks of the river. Here, Cézanne painted a famous work called *La Maison du pendu,* or *The House of the Hanged Man*, as well as the house of Dr. Paul Gachet.

» All of these artists had enjoyed the hospitality of this eccentric physician who lived in a stately house in the center of Auvers. He invited Vincent over for lunch twice a week, not only to give him a good meal but also to

check on his mental state—all while they debated the finer points of art. In time, Vincent decided to paint his new friend. The two versions of the portrait rank among his finest works.

The Auberge Ravoux

» Vincent found rooms at the Café de la Mairie, which was run by Gustave Ravoux and his wife, Adeline. The room was sparse and located just under the attic, like Vincent's boyhood room in Zundert. It had only one small skylight, which meant he couldn't use it as a studio, but Ravoux was kind enough to give him the key to a room behind the café that visiting painters often used. Vincent set off right away to paint the village and the wonderful scenery that could be found in the fields.

» It seemed that everything was going well, but Vincent was lonely. He fixed his mind on the idea that Theo and his family should come and live in Auvers. Theo tried to deflect the issue by asking a young Dutch painter called Anton Hirschig to go and spend some time with Vincent. Hirschig duly arrived at the Ravoux Inn and even took a room next door to Vincent's. But he was repelled by Vincent's tattered clothes, his odd behavior, and the scar that had replaced his ear. This is the great tragedy of Vincent van Gogh: He was a man who desperately needed love and friendship to keep his mental illness at bay, and yet he never found it.

Paris

» Back in Paris, tensions in the van Gogh family were rising. Theo constantly worried that he did not make enough money to support both his family and Vincent in Auvers. Theo poured his heart out in a letter to his brother, which increased Vincent's sense of guilt. After reading the letter, Vincent jumped on a train back to Paris, where he arrived, unannounced, at the apartment on Cité Pigalle.

» The visit was a complete disaster. Against the objections of his wife, Theo decided to confront the owners of the Goupil art gallery, now known as Boussod et Valadon, and demand a raise. Vincent joined in the argument, and things went downhill from there. Afterward, they all felt sorry that things had gotten out of hand.

» Upon his return to Auvers, Vincent began to break down once more. He knew that the solution was to free Theo of the burden of supporting him financially, but where would that leave him? On July 24, he drafted his last letter to Theo. And three days later, on July 27, he had his lunch at the café and then took his easel, his canvas, and his paints outside. At some point thereafter, people in the village heard a shot from the fields.

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An End and a Beginning

The Auberge Ravoux

» What happened that Sunday in the fields outside the village of Auvers-sur-Oise will forever remain a mystery. All sorts of theories have been offered in recent decades, some more bizarre than others. But this is the essential point: Vincent did not intend to kill himself but rather to inflict an injury. Just as when he hurt himself in Arles, this was as a cry for help. He shot himself in the belly in the hope that he would not damage any vital organs. Only by injuring himself could he compel Theo and Jo to come stay with him in Auvers.

» Had he been in Paris and received immediate medical care, chances are he might have survived. But that is not what happened. After the bullet struck his abdomen, he fainted, and then he slowly made his way back to the café. Theo arrived on Monday afternoon, and Vincent passed away at 1:30 in the morning of Tuesday, July 29. A wake was held in the studio room of the café, with Vincent lying in an open coffin, surrounded by his paintings. On Wednesday afternoon, he was carried to the cemetery of Auvers-sur-Oise and buried in a simple grave. Theo never recovered from the death of his older brother, and he died on January 25, 1891, just six months later.

Bernheim-Jeune

» At that moment, it seemed the art of Vincent van Gogh would fade from the pages of history. But there were two main currents that kept the memory of Vincent alive. One was the seed that was planted during that famous exhibit of Les Vingt in Brussels. Another was the fact that Signac, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Pissarro continued with their annual exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists since none of them were admitted to the official Salon in Paris. In 1890—the year of Vincent's death—they included 10 of his paintings. The next exhibit in 1891 featured even more works, including a large number of drawings.

» Of course, the immediate impact of these exhibits was limited because most of the work remained unsold. On the other hand, they did bring Vincent to the attention of art critics. Julien Leclercq, a poet by inclination and a critic by trade, seized on the idea of creating a traveling exhibition of all sorts of modern French art and taking it to northern Europe. The response to Vincent's paintings was so encouraging that in 1901, Leclercq decided to organize the first one-man show for van Gogh. This was held at the art gallery of Bernheim-Jeune, one of the oldest art dealers in Paris.

The Van Gogh Museum

» Leclercq's exhibit was a watershed moment for one major reason: It was attended by a German art critic named Paul Cassirer. In fact, it is in Germany that two strands of the van Gogh legacy come together. While Cassirer was busy promoting Vincent's art in Germany, Theo's widow, Jo, focused on editing and translating the letters. The first volume was published in 1914.

» Jo had continued to curate her own considerable collection of Vincent's paintings, and in 1925, upon her death, these passed into the hands of her son, Vincent Willem. Eventually, they were loaned to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and in 1973, they became the nucleus for the formation of the Van Gogh Museum. The building was designed by the renowned Dutch architect Gerrit Rietveld, and today it is one of the top tourist attractions in Holland.

The National Gallery of Art

» In the United States, there are several museums with works by van Gogh in their permanent collections, including The Museum of Modern Art, which owns *The Starry Night*. Much of Vincent's fame in the United States

was boosted by the novel *Lust for Life* by Irving Stone, first published in 1934. While the book is not always accurate, it inspired an Academy Award–winning movie starring Kirk Douglas.

» The National Gallery of Art in Washington DC has one of the largest van Gogh collections in the world. Here, you can see the beautiful *La Mousmé* from Arles and that mysterious portrait of the *Girl in White,* painted in Auvers-sur-Oise mere weeks before Vincent's death.

Bibliography

Because bibliographies can sometimes be bewildering, the following will provide some guidelines for readers who would like to learn more about Vincent and his time.

First, if you are interested in seeing all of Vincent's works, then *Van Gogh: The Complete Paintings* by Ingo Walther and Rainer Metzger is probably your best choice. Unlike the catalogues raisonnés by Jacob-Baart de la Faille and Jan Hulsker, this heavy tome shows all of Vincent's paintings in magnificent color. The only aspect marring this book is that, unlike the paintings, the narrative is not in chronological order. Instead, it's organized by themes. This has the rather unfortunate effect that the text on any given page does not necessarily refer to the paintings shown on that page. But as a compendium of all of Vincent's paintings in color, this publication is invaluable. It has also been reissued several times over the last decade, which attests to its enduring popularity.

Of course, Vincent's art is inseparable from the tragic course of his life. There are a number of biographies extant, but only a few are of scholarly merit. One of these is *Van Gogh: The Life* by Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, which traces Vincent's life in exhaustive detail and with scores of endnotes (including the now-controversial endnote suggesting that Vincent was murdered by the 16-year-old René Secrétan). This book is not always an easy read, however, and it's not nearly as accessible *Van Gogh: His Life and His Art* by the British art historian David Sweetman. Though in some respects this book is in urgent need of revisions as a result of new research, it is a fascinating read that you will find difficult to put down. Unfortunately, Sweetman passed away in 2002, which may explain why his book has not been republished in recent years.

By contrast, readers who are simply interested in an accessible introductory text about Vincent's art will find this in *Living with Vincent van Gogh: The Homes and Landscapes That Shaped the Artist* by Martin Bailey. This is an inviting and up-to-date overview of the artist's life and principal works. And for readers who are particularly interested in matching historical locations to Vincent's art, the best book is undoubtedly Nienke Denekamp's *The Vincent van Gogh Atlas*.

Among the more scholarly works listed are a number of important monographs that were commissioned in tandem with a major retrospective exhibit of Vincent's art. These include the monographs of the Arles, Saint-Rémy, and Auvers periods by Ronald Pickvance and the fine publications by Sjraar van Heugten at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. For those who read French, Alain Mothe's *Les 70 jours de van Gogh à Auvers* is a fascinating, day-by-day memoir of Vincent's final months in Auvers-sur-Oise, largely based on the diary and letters of Dr. Paul Gachet.

No overview of the van Gogh literature is complete without mention of Vincent's letters. In 1988, the publisher Gallimard released Vincent's letters from 1886 through 1890 in their original French. English translations of these letters have been around in many different iterations for decades, particularly after the letters passed into the public domain. Some readers will undoubtedly remember the edited edition of Vincent's letters by the novelist Irving Stone, titled *Dear Theo: The Autobiography of Vincent van Gogh.* Of course, it was Stone's novel *Lust for Life* that served as the basis for the Academy Award–winning motion picture. There are many inaccuracies in both the novel and the motion picture, but there is no question that Stone was a major catalyst in fostering Vincent's fame in North America and beyond. For an authoritative and annotated English guide to the letters, however, there is *Vincent van Gogh: A Life in Letters* by the Van Gogh Museum curator Nienke Bakker. For readers who would like to see a selection of Vincent's letters paired with the paintings he is writing about, there is Rosalind Ormiston's *Vincent van Gogh: Masterworks*.

We confront a somewhat similar quandary when we try to grapple with the flood of publications about the French impressionists and post-impressionists, who had a powerful influence on Vincent during and after his stay in Paris from 1886 through 1888. Here, again, quantity does not always mean quality, and it's usually best to stick to monographs that were published as part of a major retrospective exhibition about a particular artist. Such exhibits—which are often generously funded by public and private donors—allow art scholars to undertake extensive, original research for the exhibit catalog, which is why these publications are so invaluable for art historians. Particularly illuminating are Nancy Mathews's *Mary Cassatt: A Life*; Francoise Cachin's *Manet: 1832–1883*; Cindy Kang's *Berthe Morisot, Woman Impressionist*; and Richard Thomson's *Toulouse-Lautrec and Montmartre.*

For those who are interested in a more general overview of impressionism, the series published by Thames & Hudson is quite impressive, given the amount of fascinating information that the publisher is able to compress in a handy and affordable softcover book. Examples are Bernard Denvir's *The Impressionists at First Hand* and *The Thames and Hudson Encyclopaedia of Impressionism* as well as Phoebe Pool's *Impressionism.* Though originally written in the late 1980s and 1990s, these books continue to be reissued and can often be found in the book shops of major museums in both North America and Europe.

Vincent van Gogh

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Principal Collections

The Netherlands

Van Gogh Museum › Amsterdam
https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/

The Van Gogh Museum is a leading museum of Vincent's paintings and drawings as well as a major center of van Gogh research. Located in the heart of Amsterdam, it's at a walking distance from the city's two other major museums, the Stedelijk Museum and the Rijksmuseum.

Kröller-Müller Museum › Otterlo
https://krollermuller.nl/en/

The Kröller-Müller Museum is the other major collection of Vincent's paintings and drawings, located in the heart of the lovely Hoge Veluwe National Park in the east of the country. Some travel guides rate the museum higher than the Amsterdam museum because of the beauty of its location and the fact that it attracts less crowds. Though accessible by public transport, a rental car is recommended to enjoy the beautiful park.

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen › Rotterdam
https://www.boijmans.nl/en

Though less known than the Van Gogh Museum and the Kröller-Müller Museum, the Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam has a number of van Gogh paintings and drawings in its permanent collection, including *A Weaver's Cottage* (Nuenen) and the *Portrait of Arman Roulin* (Arles).

France

Musée d'Orsay › Paris
https://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr

The Musée d'Orsay, located in a former railway station, is a major museum of 19th-century French art. Its collection, which was previously housed in the Jeu de Paume, contains a number of van Gogh paintings, including *Starry Night over the Rhone* (Arles), the *Portrait of Dr. Gachet* (Auvers), and *The Church of Auvers* (Auvers).

Germany

Museum Folkwang › Essen
https://www.museum-folkwang.de/desktop/en.html

The Folkwang is Germany's leading museum of 20th-century art. It owns the *Portrait of Armand Roulin* (Arles) as well as works by Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Paul Signac, and Camille Pissarro.

Great Britain

The National Gallery › London
https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/

The National Gallery has several important van Gogh paintings, including *Van Gogh's Chair* (Arles) and *Sunflowers* (Paris and Arles).

Spain

Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum › Madrid
https://www.museothyssen.org/en

This museum has an impressive collection from several of van Gogh's periods, including *Les Vessenots in Auvers.*

Switzerland

Kunstmuseum Basel › Basel
https://www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch

The Kunstmuseum has two works from the Auvers period: *Marguerite Gachet at the Piano* and *Daubigny's Garden*, which some contend is the last painting Vincent made before his death. The museum also has the *View of Paris* from Montmartre, painted in 1886.

United States

National Gallery of Art › Washington DC
https://www.nga.gov

The National Gallery of Art has one of the largest collections of van Gogh paintings and drawings outside Europe, including *La Mousmé* (Arles) and the enigmatic *Girl in White* (Auvers). It also has masterworks by the French impressionists and post-impressionists.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art › New York, NY
https://www.metmuseum.org/

Although it is mostly known as a museum of old masters, The Met has a surprising number of van Gogh paintings, including *Self-Portrait with Straw Hat* (Paris), *Madame Roulin and Her Baby* (Arles), and the *Wheat Field with Cypresses* (Saint-Rémy).

The Museum of Modern Art › New York, NY
https://www.moma.org

MoMA is renowned for its prized possession, *The Starry Night*.

Guggenheim Museum › New York, NY
https://www.guggenheim.org

Among the Guggenheim's collection of modern art is a surprising number of van Gogh paintings, although not all may be on display because of the frequency of its rotating exhibitions. The works include *Landscape with Snow* (Arles), *Mountains at Saint-Rémy*, and the letter (in English) to John Peter Russell.

Yale University Art Gallery › New Haven, CT
https://artgallery.yale.edu

The Yale University Art Gallery owns *The Night Café* (Arles) as well as two landscape paintings.

Getty Center › Los Angeles, CA
https://www.getty.edu/museum/

The Getty Center has opened a special room for its prized possession, the *Irises* from the Saint-Rémy period.

Hammer Museum › Los Angeles, CA
https://hammer.ucla.edu/

Another surprising collection of van Gogh works is the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, which owns the view of the garden at the *Hospital at Saint-Rémy*. It also has some Dutch works as well as some outstanding drawings, notably a *Portrait of Joseph Roulin* (Arles).

Norton Simon Museum › Pasadena, CA
https://www.nortonsimon.org/

A collection of van Gogh art can be found in the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, CA, in addition to a valuable cache of impressionist works. Among others, the museum boasts *The Vicarage Garden under Snow* (Nuenen), *Portrait of Patience Escalier* (Arles) and *The Mulberry Tree* (Saint-Rémy).

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