

Vincent van Gogh

Vincent Willem van Gogh (30 March 1853 – 29 July 1890) was a Dutch Post-Impressionist painter who posthumously became one of the most famous and influential figures in Western art history. In a decade, he created about 2,100 artworks, including around 860 oil paintings, most of which date from the last two years of his life. They include landscapes, still lifes, portraits and self-portraits, and are characterised by bold colours and dramatic, impulsive and expressive brushwork that contributed to the foundations of modern art. Not commercially successful, he struggled with severe depression and poverty, eventually leading to his suicide at age thirty-seven.

Born into an upper-middle-class family, Van Gogh drew as a child and was serious, quiet, and thoughtful. As a young man, he worked as an art dealer, often traveling, but became depressed after he was transferred to London. He turned to religion and spent time as a Protestant missionary in southern Belgium. He drifted in ill health and solitude before taking up painting in 1881, having moved back home with his parents. His younger brother Theo supported him financially; the two kept a long correspondence by letter. His early works, mostly still lifes and depictions of peasant labourers, contain few signs of the vivid colour that distinguished his later work. In 1886, he moved to Paris, where he met members of the avant-garde, including Émile Bernard and Paul Gauguin, who were reacting against the Impressionist sensibility. As his work developed he created a new approach to still lifes and local landscapes. His paintings grew brighter as he developed a style that became fully realised during his stay in Arles in the South of France in 1888. During this period he broadened his subject matter to include series of olive trees, wheat fields and sunflowers.

Van Gogh suffered from psychotic episodes and delusions and though he worried about his mental stability, he often neglected his physical health, did not eat properly and drank heavily. His friendship with Gauguin ended after a confrontation with a razor when, in a rage, he severed part of his own left ear. He spent time in psychiatric hospitals, including a period at Saint-Rémy. After he discharged himself and moved to the Auberge Ravoux in Auvers-sur-Oise near Paris, he came under the care of the homeopathic doctor Paul Gachet. His depression persisted, and on 27 July 1890, Van Gogh is believed to have shot himself in the chest with a revolver, dying from his injuries two days later.

Van Gogh was commercially unsuccessful during his lifetime, and he was considered a madman and a failure. As he only became famous after his suicide, he came to be seen as a misunderstood genius in the public imagination. His reputation grew in the early 20th century as elements of his style came to be incorporated by the Fauves and German Expressionists. He attained widespread critical and commercial success over the ensuing decades, and is remembered as an important but tragic painter whose troubled personality typifies the romantic ideal of the tortured artist. Today, Van Gogh's works are among the world's most expensive paintings to have ever sold, and his legacy is honoured by a museum in his name, the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, which holds the world's largest collection of his paintings and drawings.

[source: Wikipedia]

A. Match these words from the text to their definitions:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 01. posthumously | a) money or property that you receive from someone after they die; inheritance |
| 02. still life | b) succeed in achieving something after trying for a long time |
| 03. correspondence | c) following, subsequent |
| 04. sever | d) a picture of an arrangement of objects, for example flowers or fruit |
| 05. discharge oneself | e) continue to exist or happen |
| 06. persist | f) the process of sending and receiving letters |
| 07. attain | g) cut off |
| 08. commercial | h) happening etc. after someone's death |
| 09. ensuing | i) related to business and the buying and selling of goods and services |
| 10. legacy | j) leave hospital before one's treatment is complete |

B. Choose the correct answer:

01. Van Gogh was from **Denmark / the Netherlands**.
02. He was a **painter / composer**.
03. The **minority / majority** of art critics consider his art superb now.
04. He made around **2,100 / 860** paintings using oil colours.
05. Most of his art was completed **before / after** 1888.
06. His art is characterised by use of **bright / muted** colours.
07. **Art galleries were / His brother Theo was** his main source of income.
08. He led a **serene and blissful / frustrated and tormented** life.
09. He passed away in **1888 / 1890**.
10. People thought he was a **gifted / hopeless** painter while he was alive.

C. True or False?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 01. His family was impoverished. | T | F |
| 02. Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin used to be friends. | T | F |
| 03. Van Gogh was an atheist. | T | F |
| 04. He took great care of his body. | T | F |
| 05. His sanity concerned him a lot. | T | F |
| 06. The largest collection of his works is in the Netherlands. | T | F |
| 07. He usually painted members of the aristocracy. | T | F |
| 08. He was on good terms with Theo van Gogh. | T | F |
| 09. His work has influenced many artists after him. | T | F |
| 10. His death was due to natural causes. | T | F |