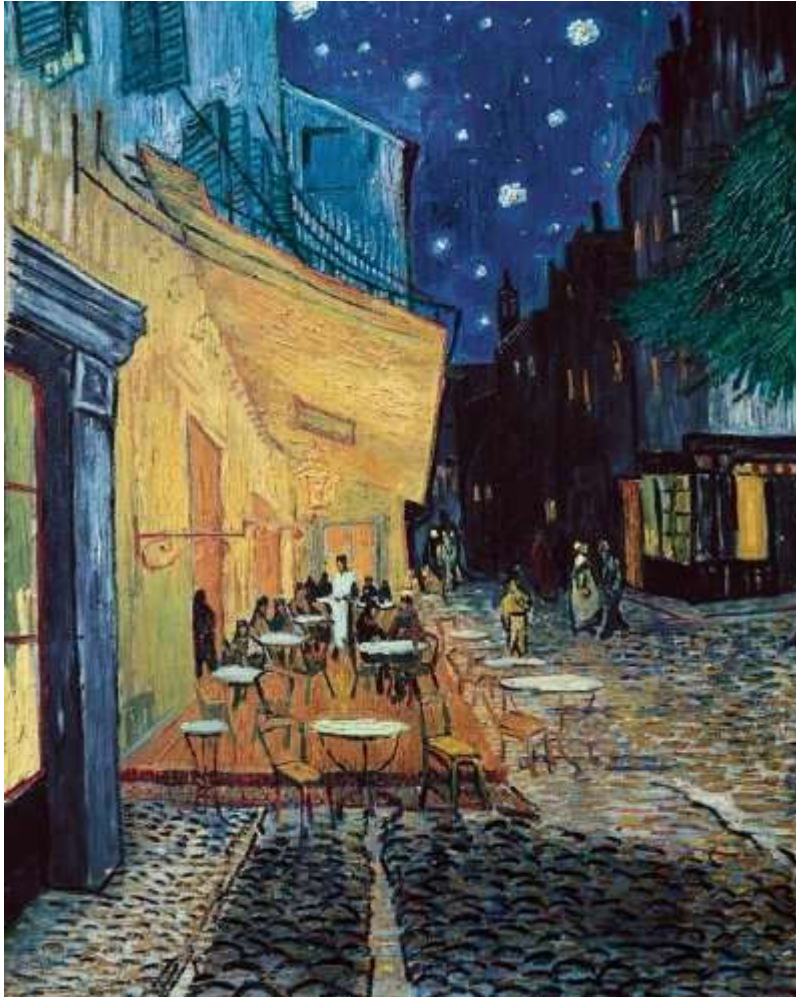


# Vincent van Gogh Paintings from Arles

BY **DEBRA N. MANCOFF**



*Café Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night* is an oil on canvas (32x25-3/4 inches) that is housed in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands.

Vincent van Gogh's years in Paris had been invigorating, but he was now feeling physically drained and emotionally overstimulated. He longed for a community of like-minded painters who would live and work together in harmony with nature and one another, as he imagined artists lived in Japan. To pursue these ideals, van Gogh decided to

move to Arles, in the south of France.

Van Gogh arrived in Arles during the middle of a heavy snowstorm late in February 1888. Although spring seemed distant, he noticed an appealing and subtle difference in the color of the landscape from that of the north. There were yellow rocks and red soil, as well as mountains beyond the village that appeared lilac in the chilly air.

After years of painting bouquets in Paris, van Gogh was now inspired by the spectacle of the flowering [fruit trees](#) in the early spring. He set up his easel in the orchards, working swiftly to capture the ephemeral beauty before the burgeoning fruit replaced the flowers. He used

pure pigment to get the freshest tones and applied it to his canvas with a light touch to echo the pale, translucent petals flickering on the branches.

Van Gogh abandoned the self-conscious approach to painting he had practiced in Paris and followed his own instincts. He worked freely over the surface of his paintings, applying thick paint on some areas while allowing bare patches of raw canvas to remain exposed. By mid-May, van Gogh had completed at least 20 canvases.

Van Gogh's paintings from Arles reflect an artist discovering new colors, new contrasts, and new enthusiasm. The following pages take you to these paintings.

- [The Harvest](#): Vincent van Gogh used the natural elements of a country landscape to structure the composition of *The Harvest*.



***The Harvest* is an oil on canvas (28-3/4x36-1/4 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.**

Vincent returned to his earlier panoramic approach to depict the first harvest of the year in *The Harvest*, which he painted in 1888.

Van Gogh's deliberate approach to spatial organization -- the crops in

the foreground, the fields above, and the mountains on the high horizon -- reveals his desire to attain some of the epic grandeur [Paul Cézanne](#) achieved with similar subjects. He worked with intense focus, writing to Emile Bernard that he had seven studies in progress and felt like one of the harvesters working under the blazing [sun](#).

- [Sprig of Flowering Almond Blossom in a Glass](#): As Vincent van Gogh explored the Arles countryside, he became fascinated with the tiny green buds on the bare branches of almond trees.

***Sprig of Flowering Almond Blossom in a Glass*** is an oil on canvas (9-1/2x7-1/2 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.



Vincent painted *Sprig of Flowering Almond Blossom in a Glass* in 1888. The painting's composition and color paid tribute to the Japanese aesthetic van Gogh admired.

Van Gogh hoped that Arles, France, would provide a tranquil and quiet setting for his life and work. Once settled, he painted a sprig of an almond branch, which he forced into early flowering in a glass of water. The irregular pattern of the little branch, covered with pale, translucent blooms, gave him a subject

that recalled the depiction of flowers in Japanese prints. The simple division of the silvery, violet background with a scarlet band pays tribute to the Japanese aesthetic.

- [The Postman Joseph Roulin](#): Vincent van Gogh created a friendship with the subject of this painting, postman Joseph Roulin.





***The Postman Joseph Roulin* is an oil on canvas (32x25-3/4 inches) that is housed in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston**

Vivid, contrasting hues in resonant combinations create a striking effect in *The Postman Joseph Roulin*. [Vincent van Gogh](#) completed this painting in 1888.

In Paris, van Gogh was often in the company of like-minded friends, whom he met in the cafés and galleries that were frequented by artists. In Arles, France, he generally was alone, but he struck up a strong friendship with

Joseph Roulin and his family. Van Gogh painted several portraits of the postal worker in his official uniform, conveying his admiration for the [man](#) in the solidity of his form and the quiet dignity of his expression.

- [Café Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night](#): Vivid colors enhance a nightlife scene in this Vincent van Gogh painting.

After a summer of painting in the sunny fields, [Vincent van Gogh](#) began to explore the potential of *plein air* painting at night. The result is *Café Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night*, which van Gogh completed in 1888.

The café offered a study in contrasts: the glow of the gas-lit square and the dark sky illuminated with [stars](#). Vincent described the painting as "a night picture without any black in it" and admitted, "it amuses me enormously to paint the night right on the spot."

- **Landscape with Snow:** Vincent van Gogh found new inspiration in the Arles countryside.



Observe how van Gogh applied his characteristic interpretation of color to this winter landscape.

***Landscape with Snow* is an oil on canvas (15-1/16x18-3/16 inches) that is housed in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.**

Van Gogh painted *Landscape with Snow* in 1888. The painting is inspired by the change in landscape van Gogh saw after moving from Paris to Arles,

France.

The desire to work in a warmer climate motivated van Gogh's move from Paris to Arles. Upon his arrival in February, he was surprised to find the region blanketed in snow. Despite the damp cold, he set up his easel outdoors to paint the exquisite landscape, notable for the pale lilac hue of the mountains.



**Peach Tree in Blossom**

**(Souvenir de Mauve):** Vincent van Gogh took great delight in painting the fruit trees of Arles while they were in full blossom.

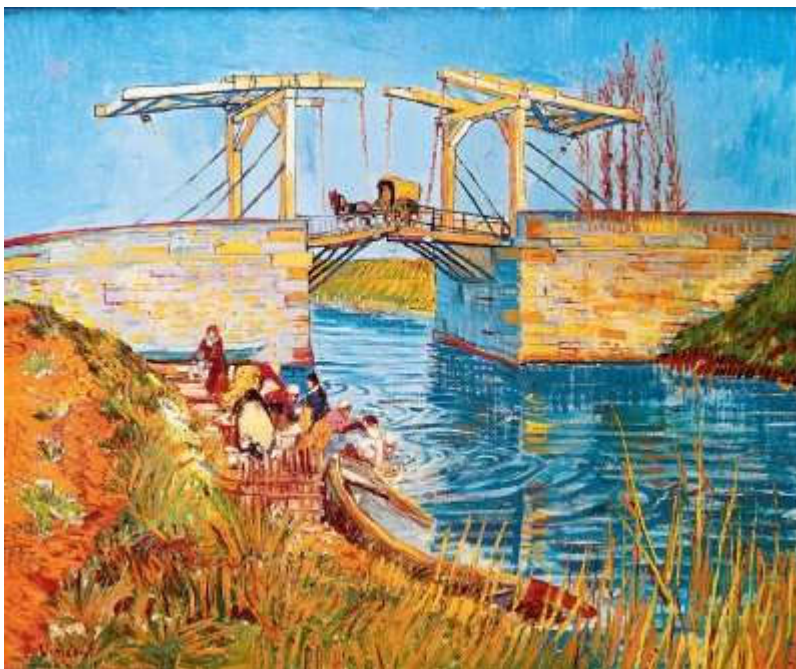
***Peach Trees in Blossom (Souvenir de Mauve)* is an oil on canvas (28-3/4x23-1/2 inches) that is housed in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands.**



When the weather in Arles, France, turned mild in March, van Gogh reveled in the changing landscape. He painted *Peach Trees in Blossom (Souvenir de Mauve)* in 1888.

By the end of March all the fruit trees -- plum, apricot, pear, apple, and cherry -- were either budded or in full bloom. Van Gogh worked rapidly with flickering strokes to capture the beautiful but fleeting effect. While painting pink peach trees he received news of the death of Anton Mauve. The older painter had urged van Gogh to use color freely, and Vincent dedicated this painting to his memory.

- [Langlois Bridge at Arles with Women Washing](#): Vincent approached his 1888 painting, *Langlois Bridge at Arles with Women Washing*, with the Japanese aesthetic he so admired.



***Langlois Bridge at Arles with Women Washing* is an oil on canvas (21-1/4 25-1/2 inches) that is housed in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands.**

Van Gogh thought of Arles as a French counterpart to the world he saw in the Japanese prints: clear air, blossoming trees, and the local people purposefully working in harmony with

nature. He longed to see "nature under a brighter sky" to better understand what inspired the artists in Japan. He approached the subject of the Langlois Bridge mindful of the Japanese example, employing clear color and emphasizing the linear patterns of the bridge structure against the sky.

- [The White Orchard](#): Working with urgency, Vincent van Gogh sought to capture the splendor of trees in full bloom before the change of seasons.



***The White Orchard* is an oil on canvas (23-1/2x32 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.**

Vincent painted *The White Orchard* in 1888. Well aware that time was short to paint the [trees](#) in flower, van Gogh worked with a sense of urgency when creating this painting.

Van Gogh wanted to capture the natural spectacle of the petals sparkling in the clear spring [sun](#). The tones he chose were luminous and [light](#), shades of pink, aqua, and green that marked a change from the rich, jewel-toned palette he developed in Paris. His immersion in plein air painting restored his sense of vitality, as well as his sense of purpose.



**[Almond Tree in Blossom](#):** In Arles, Vincent van Gogh abandoned the analytical path he'd adopted in Paris.

***Almond Tree in Blossom* is an oil on canvas (19x14 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.**

Vincent painted *Almond Tree in Blossom* in 1888. Van Gogh adapted every effect in his reach to serve the purpose of the painting -- portraying the spectacle of nature coming into full flower.

Painting in the orchards freed van Gogh's approach from the



analytical path he had established as a mode of self-education in Paris. He now worked with unprecedented spontaneity, dabbing color, building impasto, and painting with broken and calligraphic strokes uninhibited by his previous concern for prevailing theory or technique.

- **Field of Flowers near Arles:** Vincent van Gogh composed this painting after the early arrival of summer in Arles.



***Field of Flowers near Arles* is an oil on canvas (21-1/4x25-1/2 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.**

Inspired by the seasonal changes in Arles, **Vincent van Gogh** painted *Field of Flowers near Arles* in 1888.

Summer arrived early in Arles, France, and the wild **irises** bloomed in the

meadows. Van Gogh described the delightful scene in a letter to his brother: "A little town surrounded by fields all covered with yellow and purple flowers ... just like a Japanese dream." The seasonal change prompted van Gogh to brighten his pale palette, reintroducing the strong clear blues and golden yellows that had fascinated him the previous summer.



**The Sower:** Vincent van Gogh's use of color and brush stroke come together to create this dramatic composition.

***The Sower* is an oil on canvas (25-1/4x31-3/4 inches)**



that is housed in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands.

Vincent completed *The Sower* in 1888. In the painting, the modest, calm figure of the sower is subsumed into the chromatic vitality of the world that surrounds him.

The field in which the sower casts the new seeds vibrates with dabs of blue and yellow. With flickers of black, van Gogh depicted birds descending to feast on the seeds, and he used vertical impasto strokes to paint the stalks of grain. A burning sun hovers in the yellow sky, and its thickly painted rays streak through the background.

- **Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer:** Sketching from the shore, Vincent van Gogh composed this painting with a high level of control. Note van Gogh's use of constraint in *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*.

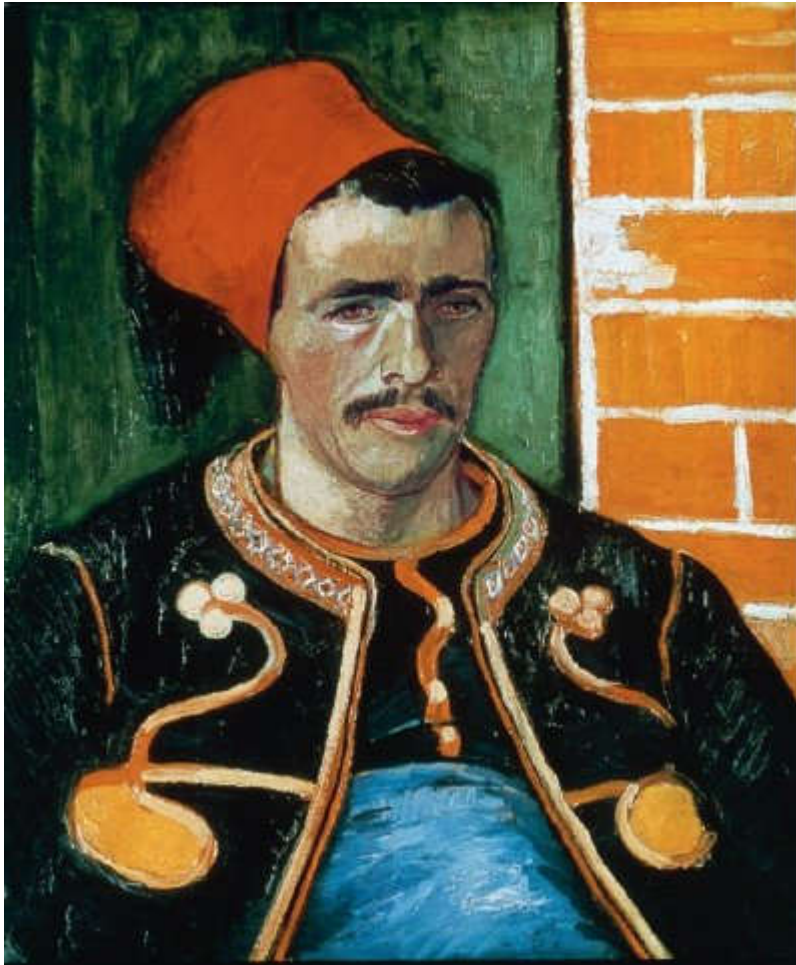


***Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer* is an oil on canvas (25-1/2x32 inches) that is housed Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.**

Vincent completed *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer* in 1888, after spending time sketching on the shore of the Mediterranean fishing village.

There is a high level of control in van Gogh's composition, with its nearly even division of land and sky and the boats positioned to break through the division and unite the separate zones. Even the color is controlled, and individual objects are bound within black contour lines.

- **The Zouave:** Vincent van Gogh believed that a painting's subject inspired the palette.



***The Zouave* is an oil on canvas (25-1/2x21-1/2 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.**

Vincent painted *The Zouave* in 1888 - a division of French-Algerian soldiers he encountered in Arles. His portrait of a soldier in his uniform signaled a change in his approach to color.

The paint is applied thickly, in broad areas, in heavily saturated tones of green, red, and blue that appear more sober than bright. A division of French-Algerian soldiers billeted in Arles, France, the Zouaves were

notorious for their recklessness on and off the battlefield. Van Gogh asserted that the subject inspired the palette, which he described as "a savage combination of incongruous tones."



**Corn Fields and Poppies:**

Vincent van Gogh successfully integrated his Impressionist and Japanese influences in this painting.

***Corn Fields and Poppies* is an oil on canvas (21-1/4x25-1/2**



inches) that is housed in The Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Vincent van Gogh painted *Corn Fields and Poppies* in 1888. The painting is characterized by a bold composition and vivid palette.

By June of 1888, van Gogh had attained the full assimilation of his sources. As seen in this lyrical composition of wheat waving above a flowering field, he had mastered the Impressionist approach of painting quickly to achieve the sensation of immediacy. His variable touch, from dabs to descriptive strokes, transcended the Neo-Impressionist example in its expressive power.

- *La Mousme, Sitting*: Learn how Vincent van Gogh, inspired by Pierre Loti's novel *Madame*



*Chrysantheme*, painted *La Mousme, Sitting*.

*La Mousme, Sitting* is an oil on canvas (29-1/4x23-1/2 inches) that is housed in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Always an avid reader, Vincent van Gogh was inspired by Pierre Loti's novel *Madame Chrysantheme* to paint a portrait of a mousmé. The result is van Gogh's *La Mousmé, Sitting*, which he painted in 1888.

Van Gogh explained in a letter to his brother Theo that a mousmé was a young Japanese girl. Loti's novel describes the temporary [marriage](#) of a French sailor to a young Japanese woman. In his painting, van Gogh sought a sitter -- young, comely, and modest -- who embodied the characteristics Loti portrayed in his title character.

- [Self-Portrait with Pipe and Straw Hat](#): One of Vincent van Gogh's many self-portraits, this piece embodies van Gogh's feelings of kinship with the local Arles farmers.



***Self-Portrait with Pipe and Straw Hat*** is an oil on canvas on cardboard (16-1/2x11-3/4 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

Vincent composed this painting, *Self-Portrait with Pipe and Straw Hat*, in 1888. Like all of van Gogh's self-portraits, this painting is a record of the artist's sense of identity at the time of the painting.

Here, near the end of his summer in Arles, France, van Gogh wears a coarse peasant shirt and a common straw hat and smokes a long



pipe, expressing his feelings of kinship with the local farmers. But these portraits also allowed him to continue his chromatic experiments, laying tone next to tone -- such as the pink and gray strokes on his cheeks -- for color effects rather than naturalistic depiction.

- **Encampment of Gypsies with Caravans:** Vincent van Gogh focused on the application of pigment to canvas when he composed *Encampment of Gypsies with Caravans*. Observe how



the thick layers of paint recorded every action of van Gogh's brush.

***Encampment of Gypsies with Caravan*** is an oil on canvas (17-3/4x20 inches) that is housed in Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

Vincent van Gogh downplayed the narrative aspect of his 1888 painting *Encampment of Gypsies with Caravans*, focusing instead on the application of his pigment to

the canvas.

The thick layers of impasto recorded the action of van Gogh's brush, rising off the canvas to mark the end of every stroke. This approach had become central to his work, giving the process of painting an expressive significance in the result. His technique required so much paint that he regularly asked his brother Theo for extra money to buy new supplies.

- **Oleanders:** Characteristic of most of Vincent van Gogh's still-life compositions, the objects in this painting hold special meaning for the artist. Learn about the significance of the objects in *Oleanders*.



***Oleanders* is an oil on canvas (23-3/4x29 inches) that is housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.**

For Vincent van Gogh, flowers and books were always objects of significance. This holds true for the objects in this still life, *Oleanders*, which he painted in 1888.

These books have the characteristic yellow jackets

of contemporary Naturalist novels -- one is Émile Zola's *La joie de vivre*. But color is van Gogh's supreme concern in this still life, as seen in the strong contrasts of the thickly painted pink petals, which cast lilac shadows on the table, and the heavily worked background in pure bright green.

- **Ploughed Field:** In this piece, Vincent van Gogh again employed his technique of applying thick strokes of pigment to the canvas. Observe the individual brush strokes and heavy pigment of *Ploughed Field*.



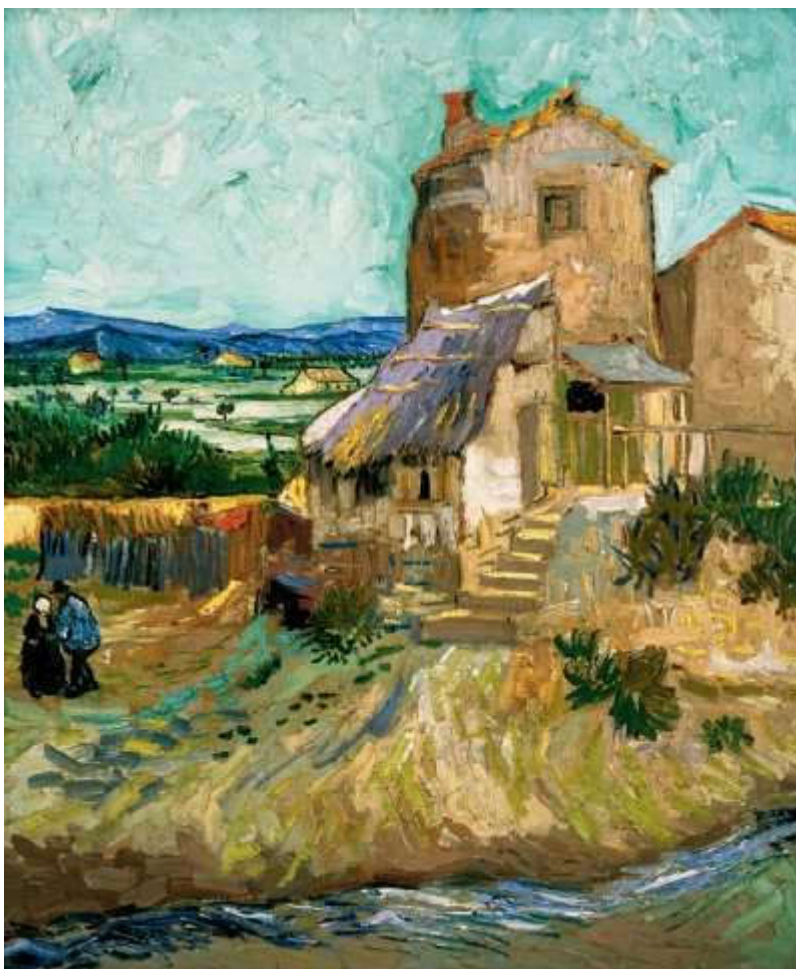
***Ploughed Field* is an oil on canvas (28-1/2x36-1/2 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.**

Vincent painted *Ploughed Field* in 1888. With thick strokes of yellow ocher, van Gogh worked the patterns of the ploughed field onto his canvas.



Individual brush strokes are evident, creating a descriptive texture through color. In the sky, it is possible to observe every time van Gogh lifted his brush as he applied the heavy pigment. He wrote to his brother Theo demanding more tubes of paint: "I need another dozen of white zinc as soon as possible."

- **The Old Mill:** The thick articulation of the artist's brush strokes bring an expressive quality to *The Old Mill*.



***The Old Mill* is an oil on canvas (25-1/2x21-1/4 inches) that is housed in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo.**

Vincent painted *The Old Mill* in 1888. Van Gogh worked at top speed during this time, pouring all his energy into his painting.

Van Gogh became so immersed in the physical process of brushing pigment on canvas that his brush strokes took on an expressive quality quite apart from the subject of the painting. The apparently serene subject of an old mill with a strolling couple in the

foreground and cultivated fields in the distance has a disturbing emotional effect as a result of the thick articulation of the strokes.

- **Starry Night over the Rhône:** Vincent van Gogh used a strong contrast of primary colors to create *Starry Night over the Rhône*, a vision of an evening sky sparkling with stars.



***Starry Night over the Rhône*** is an oil on canvas (28-1/2x36-1/4 inches) that is housed in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

Vincent painted *Starry Night over the Rhône* in 1888. The painting's vivid primary shades create a dramatic sense of contrast.

Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo that despite

his rejection of conventional religion, he felt the need for an affirmation of faith, which prompted him to "go out at night into the open and paint the **stars**." In his first "starry night," he evoked evening's darkness with deep shades of blue, violet, and green, broken by the illumination of the stars with their citron-yellow auras and the lamps on the dock in the distance casting pale yellow reflections across the water.



- [Study for "Romans Parisiens"](#): The books in this still life seem to exude individual personalities.



***Study for 'Romans Parisiens'* is an oil on canvas (20-3/4x28-3/4 inches) that is housed in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.**

As the weather turned colder in Arles, France, Vincent renewed his interest in still life. Van Gogh painted the still-life piece *Study for 'Romans Parisiens'* in 1888.

Van Gogh piled a stack of novels on the table and painted their bright yellow jackets on a modulated surface of yellow and against a thickly painted background of gold. With bent pages and broken spines, the books appear well read, and van Gogh continued to find comfort in their narratives. He was trying to instill his paintings with a kindred sympathy to the conditions of modern life.

- [Willows at Sunset](#): In this painting, Vincent van Gogh employs a vivid, saturated palette to portray the change of seasons from summer to autumn.



***Willows at Sunset* is an oil on cardboard (12-1/2x13-1/2 inches) housed in the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands.**

Vincent painted *Willows at Sunset* in 1888. The vivid tones of van Gogh's palette announce the change of season from summer to autumn.

After months of passionate and unrelenting work in

solitary circumstances, van Gogh was physically drained and deeply lonely. He felt a parallel in the ebbing vitality of the cycle of the seasons. The bare branches of the willows appear animated, as if they twist to reach out into the last rays of vigorous heat cast by the setting [sun](#).