

Vincent Van Gogh: Early Years

A Brief Understanding of Van Gogh's Early Years.

On March 30, 1853 Anna Cornelia Carpentus gave birth to a boy in Groot-Zundest, Holland. Unbeknownst to her or the father, Reverend Theodorus van Gogh of the protestant church, this boy would be tormented by severe mental instability for the majority of his life, die from his own hands, and ultimately change the outlook of art for the rest of history. His life was to become one of uncertainty and madness, involving largely his own need to find a niche and the undeniable love for art. This man was Vincent Van Gogh.

Vincent's family consisted of his three sisters Elisabeth, Anna, Wil, two brothers Theo and Cor, and his mother and father. His earliest years were spent as a quiet child with little or no attention spent on art or artistic qualities. Other specifics about Van Gogh's childhood are not known.

In 1870, after completing a sketchy array of education, Van Gogh was employed by the Hague gallery (ran by French art dealers Goupil et Cie) at the age of 16. Later in 1873 Goupil transferred Vincent to London then again to Paris by 1875. After this relocation, Gogh lost all desire to become a professional art dealer; instead following in his father's foot steps and devoting his life to the evangelization of the poor seemed more logical. Despite his erratic behavior his parents agreed to pay for his education. Gogh soon abandoned his lessons and began a ministry with the miners of Borinage. During this time he was able to identify with the miners, their lifestyles, and their families. This interaction between Gogh and the worker class is later shown in his works as he becomes fascinated with depicting peasant life.

After working with the miners for a period of time, Vincent's own urge to leave something of importance behind for mankind along with his brother Theo's consistent pressure, he became an artist. Without any proper training, or even having open artistic talent, Gogh doubted his abilities, and was supported in this doubt by his parents. However, Theo continued to push Vincent forward and supported him financially. The outcome would be the creation of a master of art, who evolved from his doubtful shell into a brilliant but besieged mind very rapidly.

Birth Year : 1853

Death Year : 1890

Country : Netherlands

Vincent van Gogh, for whom color was the chief symbol of expression, was born in Groot-Zundest, Holland. The son of a pastor, brought up in a religious and cultured atmosphere, Vincent was highly emotional and lacked self-confidence. Between 1860 and 1880, when he finally decided to become an artist, van Gogh had had two unsuitable and unhappy romances and had worked unsuccessfully as a clerk in a bookstore, an art salesman, and a preacher in the Borinage (a dreary mining district in Belgium), where he was dismissed for overzealousness. He remained in Belgium to study art, determined to give happiness by creating beauty. The works of his early Dutch period are somber-toned, sharply lit, genre paintings of which the most famous is "The Potato Eaters" (1885). In that year van Gogh went to Antwerp where he discovered the works of [Rubens](#) and purchased many Japanese prints.

In 1886 he went to Paris to join his brother Théo, the manager of Goupil's gallery. In Paris, van Gogh studied with Cormon, inevitably met [Pissarro](#), [Monet](#), and [Gauguin](#), and began to lighten his very dark palette and to paint in the short brushstrokes of the Impressionists. His nervous temperament made him a difficult companion and night-long discussions combined with painting

all day undermined his health. He decided to go south to Arles where he hoped his friends would join him and help found a school of art. [Gauguin](#) did join him but with disastrous results. In a fit of epilepsy, van Gogh pursued his friend with an open razor, was stopped by [Gauguin](#), but ended up cutting his own ear off. Van Gogh then began to alternate between fits of madness and lucidity and was sent to the asylum in Saint-Remy for treatment.

In May of 1890, he seemed much better and went to live in Auvers-sur-Oise under the watchful eye of Dr. Gachet. Two months later he was dead, having shot himself "for the good of all." During his brief career he had sold one painting. Van Gogh's finest works were produced in less than three years in a technique that grew more and more impassioned in brushstroke, in symbolic and intense color, in surface tension, and in the movement and vibration of form and line. Van Gogh's inimitable fusion of form and content is powerful; dramatic, lyrically rhythmic, imaginative, and emotional, for the artist was completely absorbed in the effort to explain either his struggle against madness or his comprehension of the spiritual essence of man and nature.

In 1881, at the age of 27, Gogh moved back in with his parents after completing nine months of further education at Brussels. At home Gogh set to work on teaching himself how to draw. He tested various different techniques and styles along with experimenting with different subject matters. Other areas he work on mastering were perspective, shading, and anatomy. Many of his earliest pieces were of pheasant life, which could be attributed with his work with the miners of Borinage. Gogh soon became passionate about becoming an acclaimed drawer of figures, and continued to practice his newly developed skills. By the end of 1881 Gogh had moved from his parent's house and was acquiring lessons from Anton Mauve, his cousin by way of marriage. Gogh also began a relationship with Sien Hoomik, a pregnant prostitute whom had had one child out of wedlock already. Gogh was deeply shunned by Mauve for this relationship thus causing the two to fall out of friendship. However, Gogh continued to master the skills of drawing and used Hoomik as a model whenever possible.

Vincent soon became irritable and made the choice to break off his relationship with Hoomik and move once again to follow artists like Van Rappard and Mauve to Drenthe. Gogh soon found a lack of inspiration and models to trying and moved back in with his parents to continue practice. Here Gogh was first introduced to the paintings of Jean-Francois Millet, French who had become quite famous across Europe for his renditions of pheasant life. Van Gogh began painting and he forcibly modeled his style after Millet. By the age of 29 Gogh had moved from his parents house and worked in a make shift studio located in a room he rented from a Catholic Church.

From the beginning of Van Gogh's artistic career he had the ambition to draw and paint figures, in 1884 he began working on mastering weathered hands, heads and other anatomical features of peasants. He was planning on creating a multiple figure piece that would push his name into a respected name of the artistic community. The piece he created was entitled 'The Potato Eaters' and was completed in 1885. This piece proved to be success, but not in his life time.

After the personal failure of 'The Potato Eaters' Vincent decided he needed some professional training in art techniques. He enrolled later that year in an academy in Antwerp where he discovered the art of Peter Paul Rubens, and various Japanese artists. Both of these factors would greatly affect Van Gogh's style in art. By early 1886 he had moved to Paris to live with his brother Theo. Here Gogh was immersed in a centrifuge of modern art from the impressionist and post impressionists. Van Gogh quickly dropped the dark colors he had used to create 'The Potato Eaters' after discovering the palette to be horrendously out of date. He adopted the brighter more vibrant colors with ease and began experimenting with the techniques he saw in the art of the

impressionist and post impressionists. He soon began to research the styles found in the Japanese artwork he had discovered a year earlier.

While in Paris Gogh was acquainted with various other artists including: Paul Gauguin, Camille Pissarro, Claude Monet, and Emile Bernard. Likewise Vincent befriended Paul Gauguin and moved to Arles in 1888 hoping that his new friends would join him to create a school of art. Gogh was confident in his new and highly personal style and felt that he could attribute to modern art with his outlandish new color combinations.

Later Paul Gauguin did join Van Gogh in Arles. Gogh began painting sunflowers to decorate Gauguin's bedroom. These sunflowers would later become one of Gogh's signature pieces. Although something much greater was brewing in Gogh's head, that he couldn't control.

Towards the end of 1888 the first signs of Van Gogh's mental illness began to take hold. He suffered from various types of epilepsy, psychotic attacks, and delusions. One such episode entailed Gogh pursuing Gauguin with a knife and threatened him intensely. Later that day Gogh returned to their house and mutilated his ear, then offered it to a prostitute as a gift. Gogh was temporarily hospitalized and released to find Gauguin swiftly leaving Arles and his dream of an artistic community shattered.

As the year of 1888 came to an end Gogh traveled to Saint Remey where he committed himself to an asylum. Here his paintings became a torrent of activity. Although he could not draw and paint for long periods of time without suffering from an attack, he managed to create 'Starry Night' which resides as his most popular work and one of the most influence pieces in history. The swirling lines of the sky are a possible representation of his mental state. This same shaken style is visible in all of his work during his time in the asylum.

Gogh left Saint Remey in 1890 and began contacting his Brother Theo. Van Gogh continued working and created a number of pieces; nearly one painting day. Gogh viewed his life as horribly wasted, personally failed, and impossible. On 27 July 1890 Van Gogh attempted suicide by shooting himself in the chest. He survived, but died two days later from the wound.

Theo, who had collected the majority of Gogh's work from Paris, died only six months later. His widow took the collection to Holland and dedicated herself to getting the now deceased Gogh the recognition he deserved. She published his work and Gogh became famous nearly instantly. His reputation has been growing since.

The story of Vincent Van Gogh's tragic life filled with mental evils and artistic triumphs lingers, almost becoming that of legend. His work is still astounding millions around the world daily, and though he sold only one painting in his life, his influence on the outcome of art has been amazing and overwhelming. His paintings have reached new records when sold for hundreds of millions of dollars, and his persona has sparked number one hit songs. Vincent Van Gogh has altered mankind forever... and he believed his life was a terrible failure!

Time Line of the Major Events of Gogh's Life

