The Van Gogh Museum Journal 2002

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Abbreviation: VGMJ

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In 2000 the Van Gogh Museum will have been in existence for 50 years. Our museum is thus still a relative newcomer on the international scene. Nonetheless, in this fairly short period, the Van Gogh Museum has established itself as one of the liveliest institutions of its kind, with a growing reputation for its collections, exhibitions and research programmes. The past year has been marked by particular success: the Van Gogh and Gauguin exhibition attracted record numbers of visitors to its Amsterdam venue. And in this Journal we publish our latest acquisitions, including Manet’s The jetty at Boulogne-sur-mer, the first important work by this artist to enter any Dutch public collection.

By a happy coincidence, our 50th anniversary coincides with the 150th of the birth of Vincent van Gogh. As we approach this milestone it seemed to us a good moment to reflect on the current state of Van Gogh studies. For this issue of the Journal we asked a number of experts to look back on the most significant developments in Van Gogh research since the last major anniversary, 1990, the centenary of the artist’s death. Our authors were asked to filter a mass of published material in differing areas, from exhibition publications to writings about fakes and forgeries. To complement this, we also invited a number of specialists to write a short piece on one picture from our collection, an exercise that is intended to evoke the variety and resourcefulness of current writing on Van Gogh.

The picture we offer in this publication, however, is far from complete. For example, we have not provided a detailed account of technical research into Van Gogh’s paintings, a line of enquiry that has become increasingly important in recent years, providing insights into the way the artist worked and helping to clarify issues of authenticity. Nevertheless, our survey suggests that interest in Van Gogh remains not only undiminished but has even intensified since 1990. It is also possible to identify a number of trends. It would appear, for example, that scholars are paying more attention to the original source material, striving for greater accuracy as the details of the artist’s life and his oeuvre are pieced together. At the same time, there is an increasing focus on the context in which Van Gogh worked and on studying the development of his art in relation to his contemporaries. The Van Gogh and Gauguin exhibition is just one prominent example of this.

As with so many fields of research, the more new information that comes to light on Van Gogh, the more one becomes aware of the gaps in our knowledge. It is clear that there is work enough to keep us busy far beyond the next 50-year period. The Van Gogh Museum intends to continue to play a key role in research on Van Gogh, through its own projects and offering opportunities, such as this publication, to stimulate the work of outside specialists.

This edition of the Journal, then, is not just a tribute to an artist whose work remains alive and provocative a century and a half after his birth, but also to all those scholars who have dedicated their time and energy over the years to evolving a closer understanding of his art.

This year, the format of the Journal has been altered slightly, in that there is no introduction reporting on the previous year’s activities at the Van Gogh Museum. From 2004 this summary will appear in a separate publication, our new annual report. Please contact the editors should you wish to receive a copy.

John Leighton
Director
fig. 1
Portrait of Camille Pissarro, from sale Collection Coray Stoop, Lucerne (Theodor Fischer) and Amsterdam (A. Mak), 29 July 1925, lot 107
When myth seems stronger than scholarship: Van Gogh and the problem of authenticity

Stefan Koldehoff

Whenever in the past months and years the name of Vincent van Gogh has been mentioned in the international press, the reason was not necessarily a large exhibition or a spectacular record sale at an auction. The biggest headlines have always been reserved for allegedly new revelations in the debate on the authenticity of the artist's works. Frequently, the theories proffered from various sides in this debate have indeed been closely bound up with precisely those events which in themselves have a strong public appeal, namely exhibitions and auctions. This article examines the authenticity debate both as an art-historical necessity and as a media-psychological phenomenon. It also seeks to determine the extent to which the Van Gogh myth, which was deliberately generated soon after his death, must be made responsible for the fakes that have cropped up again and again over the course of the past century.

For the last 15 or so years, in widening the scope of their research to include the sociological and commercial aspects of art, a number of art historians have examined the interaction between art, the art market, collectors and the public. In 1987, Nicholas Green identified those factors responsible for the changing strategies of the art market in the second half of the 19th century in France: 'the rapid rise in particular forms of modern art [...] the role of journalism and historical expertise in securing the cultural and investment value of art works; and, crucially, the strange alliances between speculative collectors, critics and dealers. In fact, though unnamed, the operations of the latter were ever-present throughout all this enthusiastic hype and precious connoisseurship.'

The following year, Robert Jensen likewise saw the shift of the art scene from the Salons and public exhibitions to private galleries at the beginning of the 20th century as the cause of fundamental changes to art marketing during its early development: 'In our century, alliance with a private gallery became considerably more important for an artist’s career than membership in a Secession or graduating from one of the state art academies.' The strategies used by art dealers to promote the artists they represented as unique contemporary figures—and in such a way that they became firmly lodged in the awareness of potential collectors—were formulated by Jensen, again very pointedly, six years later: 'To market modernism artists, their dealers, critics, and historians required above all to establish its historical legitimacy. The historiographic enterprise was as much a part of merchandising Impressionism as the increasingly refined practices of art dealers to promote not only individual paintings but whole careers, and to do so not only through conventional publicity, but through carefully constructed exhibitions and a mode of personal persuasions that variously appealed to the speculative and/or connoisseurship skills of the potential client, the amateur.'

The challenge, therefore, was to make one’s own artist stand out against the mass of other artists in the market, either by (prematurely) establishing him as a historical figure, or by promoting him as someone absolutely singular to his time. To this end, the biographical and sociologi-
VAN GOGH MUSEUM

cal aspects of the artist's life were made increasingly important, to such an extent that in some cases the artist's biography was considered just as significant as his work – provided, of course, it was able to set him apart from the rest. This certainly applied to Van Gogh in the years following his death, perhaps more so than to any other artist of classic modernism. His biography rapidly became a sales-promoting myth, touting him as the lone wolf whose art nobody understood and who, for this reason, (allegedly) sold only one painting during his lifetime. Whilst reliable research has meanwhile succeeded in disproving most such legends, the art world and the art market have refused to be robbed of their illusions without putting up a fight. What they have sought to preserve is the aura of the most expensive painter of all times, one whose name still guarantees high circulation figures in media. The outcome of the discussion is, in the final analysis, reminiscent of the quintessential message of Umberto Eco's novel Foucault's Pendulum: one has only to believe strongly enough in one's theory and one will always find the matching proof – not to mention the means of making it public.

Anyone who has paid close attention to the relevant specialist literature knows that time and again careful corrections have been made to Vincent van Gogh's oeuvre. The acceptance or rejection of works have in the past been based on painstaking examinations of style and analyses of material, on a reconstruction of the respective picture's provenance, and on comparison with works of unquestionable authenticity. During the past ten years, however, the discussion on the authenticity of certain Van Gogh works has clearly been gathering momentum, not least through the active participation of the press, radio and television.

In order to comprehend the media-psychological mechanisms and continuities of the authenticity debate it is essential to take a look into the past, for it is the past that furnishes the prerequisites for our present understanding of this phenomenon.

The Van Gogh myth and the problem of authenticity prior to the Second World War

One of the countless myths surrounding Vincent van Gogh that has stubbornly persisted since his death, passing from one generation of authors to the next without even the slightest attempt at verification, is that of the artist's enduring lack of success. That this legend – like so many others – at best only touches on historical fact has long been beyond dispute. Only a short time after his brother's arrival in Paris, Theo van Gogh (1857–1891) wrote to his mother in June 1886: 'He is also much more cheerful than in the past and people like him here. To give you proof: hardly a day passes or he is asked to come to the studios of well known painters, or they come to see him.' While in the French capital Van Gogh made the acquaintance of Paul Gauguin, Emile Bernard and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, and he worked together with Paul Signac and Camille Pissarro. The letters of condolence received by the Van Gogh family after the artist's demise testify to the high esteem he already enjoyed among his contemporaries.5

8 Of the 20 Van Gogh paintings still owned by German museums today, 11 were acquired between 1908-12: in 1908, the Städelisches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt am Main acquired the painting Cottage and woman with goat (F 90 JH 823); and in 1910, the Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, bought the Portrait of Armand Roulin (F 493 JH 1643) from the Marcel Goldschmidt gallery in Frankfurt. (This painting was not, as hitherto maintained, confiscated as 'degenerate art' by the Nazis, but given voluntarily by the municipal authority of Cologne in 1937 to Thodor Fischer in Lucerne in exchange for an Old Master picture, which was to be given as a present to Hermann Goering's family. Fischer intended to include the painting in the notorious auction of works expropriated from German museums that took place in Lucerne on 30 June 1939; it is now owned by the Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam). The Städtisches Museum Stettin purchased A lane near Arles (F 567 JH 1419) from Thannhauser in Munich in 1910 for the sum of 10,800 Reichsmark (now in Greifswald, Pommersches Landesmuseum). The Kunsthalle Bremen bought Field with poppies (F 581 1751) in 1911, the acquisition that triggered the infamous 'protest of German artists.' In the same year, the Wallraf-Richartz Museum added Le Pont
Moreover, the essay by Roland Dorn and Walter Feilchenfeldt on the history of early Van Gogh forgeries shows how soon after his death his works were considered worth faking. This circumstance, too, testifies to Van Gogh’s popularity and his market value.

Meier-Graefe and the origins of the Van Gogh myth

This development was decisively influenced by two virtually simultaneous phenomena. Firstly, the strategy adopted by his sister-in-law, Jo van Gogh-Bonger (1862-1945), Theo’s widow and executor of his estate, for exhibiting and selling Van Gogh’s works was so clever and methodical that soon after the turn of the century the artist already counted among the most sought-after and expensive painters on the German art market. Once private collectors had become dedicated buyers of Van Gogh’s pictures, numerous museums followed suit, and in so doing sent out unmistakable signals as to Van Gogh’s significance and acceptance as an important artist.

Secondly, there was the enormous legend-making influence of the books on Van Gogh that appeared in Germany prior to the Second World War, especially those published in very large editions by the publicist and art historian Julius Meier-Graefe, which transformed Van Gogh into one of the most celebrated artists of the modern movement. In these pre-war years, Van Gogh’s supposedly tragic fate and its alleged impact on his art became familiar even in those strata of society that until then had taken little or no interest in art and artists. It was precisely during this period that the still-popular notion of the artist as a misunderstood genius hovering on the brink of madness was born.

In 1906 Meier-Graefe still described Van Gogh as first and foremost an impassioned socialist, but he later came to present a maniacal picture of the artist and his works: ‘A raging temperament has thrown them onto the canvas. Trees shriek, clouds scud in horror across the sky. Suns blaze like glowing holes, in chaos. The pictures are, we know, often painted in a blind frenzy. Cézanne would have shrugged his shoulders at this lapse of consciousness. [...] As an artist, he sought a substitute for the Church, and so it never occurred to him to make capital out of his most personal manner. Indeed, he was unaware of it. If he contented himself with transforming revered masters in his own simple way, it was because he wished to seek refuge in their sphere of influence, and also to preach and act on their behalf. [...] And precisely because he was pure and upright and of an unshakeable simplicity, and because he took for gospel that which is in fact only personal, his paintings lack depth and are threatened by the rational. We know who was behind them. Future generations will know, too. His history will rattle at every door.’

Thus Van Gogh, known from his letters to be quite capable of astute reflection both on his situation and on his art, was metamorphosed into a man of ‘raging temperament,’ ‘blind frenzy’ and ‘unshakeable simplicity.’ The legend of the supposedly deranged artistic genius that has remained popular to this day was born here – as was the basis for all the religious hype about the painter Meier-Graefe was...

de Langlois (f 570 JH 1421) to its Roulin portrait; the Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim bought bowl with sunflowers, roses and other flowers (F 290 JH 1166) from Cassier; the Zurich patroness Emy Roth donated Orchard in blossom with view of Arles (F 516 JH 1685) to the Neue Pinakothek in Munich within the compass of the so-called ‘Tschudi donation,’ a foundation privately initiated and organised in memory of the museum director Hugo von Tschudi, who died in the same year; and city councillor Victor Mösinger donated the Portrait of Dr Gachet (f 753 JH 2007) to the Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main (it was confiscated as ‘degenerate’ in 1937 and is now in a private collection). In 1912, the Düsseldorf art dealer Alfred Flechtheim sold the scenic self-portrait Painter on his way to work (f 448 JH 1491), probably destroyed during the Second World War, to the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Magdeburg, the Städtisches Kunstmuseum Essen purchased Quay with men unloading sand barges (F 449 JH 1558) from Druet in Paris, and the Neue Pinakothek in Munich added to its collection the painting Vase with twelve sunflowers (F 456 JH 1561), likewise privately financed within the compass of the ‘Tschudi donation,’ and the drawings The Rhone with boats and a bridge (f 1473 JH 1404), Canal with bridge and women washing (f 1473 JH 1400) and Enclosed field behind St Paul’s hospital (F 1562 JH 1863).


to pursue in the following years, repeatedly recycling, varying and extending his Van Gogh texts in a variety of books. 13

An initial hagiographic climax was reached after the First World War with Meier-Graefe’s novel Vincent, first published in 1921. Its subsequent editions were all subtitled, significantly, Roman eines Gottsuchers ("The story of a god-seeker"). "The purpose of the novel Vincent," wrote Meier-Graefe in the book’s programmatic conclusion, "is to further the creation of legend. For there is nothing we need more than new symbols, legends of the humanity that comes from our own loins."14 In his memoirs of the years 1921-24, Elias Canetti recalls that "following the publication of Meier-Graefe’s Vincent, Van Gogh became the most prevailing topic of conversation around the boarding house dining table. [...] That was the time when all the sacralisation of Van Gogh was beginning, and Miss Kundi once said that only now, after learning about his [Van Gogh’s] life, did she realise what Christ was about."15 This mythologizing reduction of Van Gogh’s complex personality to the simple polarity of genius and madness did not fail to have its effect on Canetti’s mother, either, even though, as the author himself wrote, ‘painting had never meant much to her.’

When Canetti, then still in his late teens, asked her about Van Gogh in the wake of Meier-Graefe’s book, he received a description that in all probability corresponded to the general perception of the artist at that time: ‘A madman who painted straw chairs and sunflowers, always in yellow, he didn’t like any other colours, until he got sunstroke and blew his brains out.’16 Thanks to Meier-Graefe’s arbitrary, pathos-filled interpretation, a complex life and an oeuvre comprising a good 2,100 works could at the time be summarized in just one sentence. He presents Van Gogh as the prototype of the romantic, unrecognized artistic genius whose disregard by society nevertheless redounds to his greater honour.

Sjaar van Heugten has shown that many of Meier-Graefe’s ‘inventions,’ some of which were first formulated in the novel, have to this day shaped the general public’s perception of Vincent van Gogh. 17 They also account for the fact that immediately after the First World War Van Gogh came to symbolise the solitary Nordic artist, the lone wolf, as distinct from the French Bohemian. 18

The art trade’s need for fakes

Naturally, the Van Gogh myth did much to increase the artist’s market value. In an essay written in 1913, Meier-Graefe noted: ‘Van Gogh’s current ranking in the market is virtually the same as that of Cézanne and has during the last ten years risen a good 20 to 40 times, and since his death, that is to say, within barely two decades, between 400 and 600 times. Such works as Sternheim’s L’Artiste 19 or The courtyard of the hospital at Arles, belonging to Theodor Behrens in Hamburg, 20 which had cost 100 francs in 1890 and between 1,000 and 2,000 francs in 1900, would at present very probably sell for even more than Cézanne’s most expensive works.’ 21

The supply of fresh paintings was regulated quite strictly. Jo van Gogh sold works from the estate primarily through only a few dealers, with whom she collaborated closely. What the collectors’ market in its dire need to give concrete form to the Van Gogh myth was unable to obtain from these conventional sources was sought and


16 Ibid.

17 Sjaar van Heugten, ‘Vincent van Gogh as a hero of fiction,’ in The mythology of Van Gogh, cit. (note 6), passim.


19 F 489 JH 1625 (Paris, Musée d’Orsay) was at that time owned by the writer Carl Sternheim.

20 F 519 JH 1687 (Winterthur, Sammlung Oskar Reinhart ‘Am Römerholz’).

found elsewhere. Works obviously deliberately forged and falsely signed appeared in various galleries and exhibitions already early on. Roland Dorn has suggested that Still life with mackerels, lemons and tomatoes (F 285, H 118) is one of the first of these intentional forgeries — intentional because it is clearly signed Vincent — and that it may have been executed as early as 1890. He and his co-author Walter Felchenfeldt have at any rate been able to demonstrate that the first clearly forged Van Gogh appeared in an exhibition held at Bernheim-Jeune in Paris in 1901 and at the Berlin Secession in 1903. Shortly afterwards, the painter Judith Gérard-Moline discovered that a copy she had done of an authentic Self-portrait (F 478, H 158), given by Van Gogh to Gauguin as a present, had been offered for sale (with a changed background) as an original Van Gogh (F 350, H -), evidently through the mediation of the painter Claude-Émile Schuffenecker, a friend of Gauguin, and his brother Amédée.24 Théodore Duret’s Van Gogh monograph, first published in 1916, already contained five dubious drawings and six dubious paintings.25 Works wrongly ascribed to Van Gogh appeared repeatedly at exhibitions and auctions during the years that followed, one of the most amusing ones being, in 1925, a Portrait of the painter Camille Pissarro (fig. 1) owned by the Swiss art dealer Han Coray.26 The two auctioneers commissioned to sell the work were evidently already aware that they were faced with a fundamental problem of authenticity, for in the auction catalogue entry they explicitly stated: ‘Dr de la Faille believes he is unable to recognize the hand of the master in this painting.’

Finally, in 1930, the author of the first Van Gogh catalogue raisonné, the Dutch lawyer J.-B. de la Faille (1886-1959), felt obliged to publish his own compilation of Van Gogh fakes.27 Already comprising as many as 174 works, it was not unreservedly accepted in the years following its publication, and certainly not by the collectors whose pictures it concerned.28

This catalogue of fakes had become necessary following the publication of De la Faille’s four-volume catalogue raisonné,29 for the latter had been accompanied by a forgery scandal on a scale never before encountered. In the spring of 1928, in the run-up to an exhibition at Paul Cassirer’s gallery, initially three and, later, as many as 50 paintings turned out to be fakes. They had all come from a certain Otto Wacker, an art dealer who shortly before had moved his business from Düsseldorf to Berlin. Wacker claimed to have taken the paintings in commission from a Russian aristocrat and then, from the mid-1920s, to have offered them for sale through other art dealers, chiefly in Berlin.30 Wacker was charged with fraud and forgery and eventually sentenced to one year’s imprisonment for repeated fraud. X-ray photographs, never before used for this purpose, proved to the court beyond all doubt that the works were forgeries; materials found in the Düsseldorfer studio of Wacker’s brother constituted further evidence. The court of appeal to which Wacker’s solicitor, Iwan Goldschmidt, then took case increased the sentence to one year and seven months plus a fine of 50,000 Reichsmark or, alternatively, 350 additional days in prison. Following the Second World War, Otto Wacker worked in the Soviet occupied zone and then in the GDR as a dancer and dancing teacher under the stage name of Olinto Lovaël.31 As early

23 Dorn and Felchenfeldt, op. cit. (note 6).
26 Sale Coray-Stoop Collection I, Lucerne (Theodor Fischer/A. Mak), 29 July 1925, lot 107. Coray’s biographer Rudolf Koella reports that the French art dealer Jean Lurçat initially offered the painting to the collector in or around 1920 as ‘a portrait of Pissarro with pipe, painted by Cézanne during his second stay in Paris’; see Rudolf Koella, Die Leben des Han Coray, Zurich, 2002, p. 165. When and how this painting later came to be attributed to Van Gogh is not known.
30 The Berlin branch of the Marcel Goldschmidt gallery in Frankfurt, for example, mounted a ‘Special Exhibition of Impressionists’ from February to March 1928. Of the nine Van Gogh works offered (cat. nos. 13-21), at least seven were Wacker forgeries: cat. no. 13 (F 539a); cat. no. 14 (F 705); cat. no. 15 (F 685); cat. no. 16 (F 577); cat. no. 19 (F 833); cat. no. 20 (F 710a); and cat. no. 21 (F 741a). Peter Kropmanns even assumes that all of the Van Gogh paintings offered were fakes; cf. Peter Kropmanns, ‘Kunstmarkt Berlin 1928. Beutekunst und Fälschungen aus der Galerie M. Goldschmidt & Co.,’ Museumjournal 111 (July 1999), pp. 8-9.
as 1946, he performed a piece entitled *Zouave* (An *Vincent van Gogh*) at the Theater des Tanzes in Weimar.32

**De la Faille’s role**

The Wacker scandal revolved not just around the question of the authenticity of these particular works of art. Very soon after the trial began, the focal point of interest in the newspapers and journals of the period became the enormous embarrassment the scandal had caused for many of the most renowned art historians of the time.33 The paintings now under suspicion had all been declared genuine by one or several experts of note and duly furnished with certificates of authenticity (figs. 2a and 2b). The Berlin newspaper *Der Abend* headlined one of its reports `Art Experts on Trial,’34 while the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* posed the question: `Are experts’ opinions worth the paper they’re written on?’35 Das Kunstblatt, published by Paul Westheim, titled its report on the case even more succinctly: `The Expert Myth.’36

De la Faille himself had contributed to the formation of this lowly view of the art expert, for once the Wacker scandal had broken he changed his opinions several times and on a variety of works. The fact that he operated occasionally as an art dealer, obtained money in return for his expert opinion, had a financial interest in the Dutch auction house A. Mak, and had himself been involved in the sale of the Wacker works threw an additional dubious light on his conduct and person.

Julius Meier-Graefe likewise changed his mind in the course of the trial – so drastically that his volte-face triggered the following response from the *Vossische Zeitung*: `Meier-Graefe, who has issued certificates of authenticity for 25 of the fakes, was asked: “What value do experts’ opinions have at all?” He replied: “Terribly little! People who purchase paintings on the strength of experts’ opinions deserve nothing else but to be taken in by them.” Now Meier-Graefe himself has given his expert opinion on paintings and it is on the strength of his opinion that these paintings have been sold for large sums of money. Is it conceivable that someone should make fun of precisely those people who have placed their unlimited trust in him?’37 Meier-Graefe’s reputation sustained permanent damage in consequence of the Wacker scandal. Like many

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32 Programme in the Deutsches Tanzarchiv, Cologne. I wish to thank Frank-Manuel Peter for this information.


34 ‘Die Kunstexpertise vor Gericht,’ *Der Abend* (19 April 1932).

35 ‘Hat die Expertise Wert und Zweck?’, *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (17 April 1932).


of his colleagues, he had become so fascinated with the Van Gogh myth that he was no longer able to make proper judgments. In June 1929, Ludwig Justi, the then-director of the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, wrote to his colleague Heinrich Alfred Schmidt in Basle: "I am indeed very pleased that you have taken a stand in this case against Meier-Graefe. Many colleagues have written to me expressing their approval, and some have even stated it publicly. I think – like you – that all serious scholars should join forces against the kind of superficial scholarship that thrives on enormous propaganda and gross assertiveness."38

In 1932, Grete Ring summed up the quintessence of the Wacker scandal as follows: "The art lover, and especially the German art lover, does not make his choices based purely on the visual aspect: his preference for a particular artist often stems from an intellectual, literary approach. He sees in Van Gogh not only the creator of beautifully colourful paintings but also revere him as the tragically talented genius, the writer of distressing confessions: for him, Van Gogh’s paintings are – to put it rather pointedly – a kind of author’s autograph. And this is why a collector’s wish for a Van Gogh cannot be satisfied by the work of any other artist; and, by the same token, even a relatively poor example of the master’s art is still desirable at times."39

Thus the decisive criterion by which Van Gogh had now come to be judged was no longer the quality of his paintings but rather the supposed story behind them. The debate on the authenticity of Van Gogh’s works had become, even at this early stage, a matter of faith, and the Van Gogh myth the gospel of the faithful. And Van Gogh forgers have exploited this fact right up to the present day.

Post-war attempts at establishing Van Gogh fakes

The debate on the authenticity of many paintings, drawings and watercolours supposedly originating from Van Gogh’s hand has remained an issue of creed to this day. During the last ten years, however, it has assumed a new quality, insofar as since 1994 it has been concerned not merely with hitherto unknown works that have come up for sale on the market. The discussion concerning the authenticity of a version of the Sunflowers (F 457 JH 1886) and the Garden at Auvers (F 814 JH 2107) represented the first large-scale investigation into the authenticity of works that had previously been indisputably accepted as genuine. Whereas before the Van Gogh myth had served to legitimise fakes, the assertion that works earlier considered au-


Perpetuating the myth

During the post-war years, too, works of dubious quality cropped up time and time again, their alleged authenticity being substantiated more by Vincent van Gogh's chequered biography than by anything else. Helping to disseminate and perpetuate the Van Gogh myth at the time were, among other things, the novel *Last for Life* by the American author Irving Stone, which sold over a million copies worldwide, and, in 1959, Vincent van Gogh’s film version, starring Kirk Douglas as Van Gogh and Anthony Quinn as Gauguin. The number of fakes appearing in these years increased to such an extent that in 1955 M.M. van Dantzig could even publish a whole book about them; entitled *Vincent?* it promised "a new method of identifying the artist and his work and of unmasking the forger and his products." 40

Among the most spectacular ‘discoveries’ of the immediate post-war period was the so-called *Selfportrait: study by candlelight* (F 476a). The American film magnate William Goetz, who had purchased this large-format painting in 1949, first exhibited it a year later. Its authenticity, which had been highly disputed from the very beginning, was said to be proven by the inscriptions on the back of the canvas. These, too, were in keeping with the Van Gogh myth and the legend of the countless works the artist was supposed to have given away: ‘Portret par V. Gogh échangé contre 9 dessins japonais – Arles, 8 déc. 1888. // Peinture représentant le portrait du peintre Van Gogh par lui-même. Achetée le 7 décembre 1947 en même temps qu’une autre sur bois du même peintre (et représentant des fleurs, un livre et une pipe) à un vieux pensionnaire du restaurant de la rue des Petits-Carreaux. Provenant de chez son oncle à qui un Pasteur nommé Salles l’avait offerte vers 1893. // P 23." 41

The editorial commission of the revised De la Faille edition 42 did not have the courage to pronounce a definitive judgment on the painting, not least on account of the diplomatic complications the matter had already been causing between the Netherlands and the United States and also the owner’s own threat to institute legal proceedings. 43

Significantly, the editors even cite the novelist Irving Stone as one of their witnesses to the painting’s authenticity. Consequently, this more than dubious work has to this day not been officially written out of Vincent van Gogh’s oeuvre.

Besides a great many other individual pictures, some of which received extensive publicity (figs. 5 and 4), 44 the alleged new discoveries not infrequently comprised – as in the Otto Wacker case – whole bundles of works, proof of their authenticity likewise being based on myths and legends that had long since been discredited.

The Jelle de Boer Collection

When the Amsterdam art dealer Jelle de Boer announced an *Exposition des impressionistes français* to be held at his Rozengracht gallery in June 1966, the art world was electrified, for de Boer promised to show ‘paintings and drawings by Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Monet, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec and Matisse hitherto unknown and never before exhibited.’ The Dutch press celebrated the show as an art-historical sensation. 45 Only a few days after the opening however, the astonishment of the experts gave way to general disillusionment: not one of the 175 exhibited works was able to stand up to even the most cursory scrutiny. When de Boer exhibited his collection at the Hofgalerie in Lucerne in the summer of 1967, offering it for sale at a total price of 8.5 million Swiss francs, the local authorities seized the works on suspicion of forgery and fraud. In 1971, one year after the art dealer’s death, most of them were returned to his widow. The present owners are now endeavouring to rehabilitate the collection by way of an itinerant exhibition. The show is scheduled to open in 2005. 46

Once again, it was not the quality of the paintings, drawings and watercolours (which is, in fact, very poor) that had served as the criterion of identification, but the legend. The myth that the Van Gogh family, considering them to be worthless, had already given away a great many works during Van Gogh’s lifetime – especially those dating from his Dutch period – also served Jelle de Boer as proof of authen-

40 M.M. van Dantzig, *Vincent?*, Amsterdam 1953.


ticity: ‘In 1905 the Van Goghs were being peddled at Breda for 5 and 10 cents. From that time I have a good many pictures, which have wandered about for years. In Paris they were sold in parcels of 10 together for one or half a franc, from the household effects of the Café du Tambourin; Van Gogh had given them all to the landlady. They were not worth a penny.’

De Boer is here referring in part to an episode the Dutch Van Gogh researcher Benno Stokvis had reconstructed in 1926, a good 40 years after the event, and which has ever since served as a source of numerous alleged Van Goghs. According to Stokvis, when Vincent van Gogh’s mother, Anna Cornelia Carbentus (1818–1901), and his sister Willemina (Wil) Jacoba (1862–1941) moved from Nuenen in 1886, the work her son had left behind when he went to Antwerp was packed into crates and deposited with a Breda carpenter whom he calls Schrauer, along with some furniture. Stokvis mentions ‘portfolios containing drawings, sketches, and watercolours, and also canvases which had not yet been stretched on frames.’ Although Mother Van Gogh later recuperated her furniture, Van Gogh’s works remained with Schrauer—who was in fact Adrianus Schrauwen (1834–1920)—and ultimately found their way into the hands of a junk dealer named Couvreur in 1903. In reply to Stokvis’s question concerning the quantity of works he had acquired, Couvreur replied: ‘Sixty framed paintings, 150 loose canvases, two portfolios containing approximately 80 pen-and-ink drawings and between 100 and 200 crayon drawings.’


46 I wish to thank David Brooks in Toronto for this information.


48 See Benno J. Stokvis, *Nasporingen omtrent Vincent van Gogh in Brabant*, Amsterdam 1926. See also the essay by Martha Op de Coul in this volume of the *Van Gogh Museum Journal*.

49 Ibid. p. 4.

50 Ibid., p. 7.
The Klusmann/Marijnissen Collection

If all the newly discovered works that have been ascribed to Vincent van Gogh did in fact originate from this group, Schrauwen and Couvreur must have been in possession of a far greater number, as sundry other owners likewise cite them as their source. In 1987, the German physician Georg Klusmann published a book entitled *Vincent van Gogh: Unbekannte frühe Werke*. It contains a selection of 95 works on paper, canvas and wood – including alleged portraits of Van Gogh’s brother Theo and their father Theodorus – which were also supposed to have come from studio in Nuenen. Klusmann claims to have found these works, 260 in all, in the attic of an old people’s home in Breda: ‘Examining them more closely, I noticed that some of the canvases were signed ‘Vincent.’ As both the technique and the subject matter were reminiscent of Van Gogh, I believed I had found something special. I was able to purchase the whole box and its contents for a negligible sum.’ His story, however, was called into question at the end of 2001: a Swiss journalist ascribed the ‘discovery’ of the collection to a Dutchman named Marijnissen, with whom Klusmann, he wrote, had not been in contact until the 1980s. The works now belong to diverse owners.

Klusmann’s first published painting – *Girl in white walking in a forest clearing* (fig. 5) – is said to have been sold to a private collector in Israel for over 500,000 Swiss francs, while various other works are back in Breda. None of them, however, is listed in either of the two recognised Van Gogh oeuvre catalogues (De la Faille and Hulsker). And although many, even the most marginal, are signed with conspicuous clarity, none of the acknowledged Van Gogh scholars or experts have testified to their authenticity. For there is one problem that not even the best provenance story can help resolve: the paintings are quite simply of abysmal quality, and would never stand up to a critical examination of their style and execution.

The Raynal-Bey Collection

There is also a collector in France who has been waiting in vain for a positive expert opinion for the past nine years: in December 1993, *Paris Match* published the story of the Paris art historian Jacques Raynal-Bey, who had come into possession of an unknown quantity of Van Goghs. Raynal-Bey claimed he had purchased them from a junk dealer at the flea market in Saint-Ouen – some of them originating from a suitcase belonging to Gauguin, others from a box belonging to Emile Bernard. The dealer had purchased them ‘autour des années 30 [...] – à l’époque où ils ne valaient rien.’ However, neither the mediocre quality of the works themselves nor Raynal-Bey’s romantic story of their provenance correspond to historical reality: by the 1950s, Van Gogh’s works had long since counted
among the best known and most expensive on the art market; they were no longer the kind of thing one bought at the puces for next to nothing.

**The 'Album japonais'**

It was also through a junk dealer that the French-Italian couple Valérie Noizet and Francesco Plateroti claimed to have made their supposedly sensational discovery. At a press conference in Paris on 17 November 1992, they maintained to have purchased an album containing six large-format Van Gogh drawings three years previously in Arles in the south of France - for 400 francs. Not until they arrived home did the couple notice the signature 'Vincent.' Once again, these drawings - which include views of Tarascon Castle, the harbour of Martique, the municipal park of Arles and a street in Les-Baux-de-Provence (fig. 6a), the latter having obviously been copied from a postcard printed after Van Gogh's death (fig. 6b) - are of breathtakingly amateurish quality, and, once again, all the acknowledged authorities have refused to testify to their authenticity. Nonetheless, Plateroti continues to tour the world with an exhibition of what he claims to be genuine Van Goghs - and Van Goghs enriched with extras, too: concealed in the six drawings, Plateroti claims, are portraits of Camille Roulin, Leonardo da Vinci, Eugène Boch, Félix Fénéon, Diego Velázquez, Rembrandt, Petrarch, Paul Gauguin and, last but not least, Van Gogh himself. However, he writes, these hidden references reveal them-

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52 Ibid., p. 20
53 Hanspeter Born, 'Auf Schatzsuche,' Das Magazin 51 (22-28 December 2001), pp. 36-47
54 Klimann, op. cit. (note 51), p. 132 (ill.).
selves only if one turns the drawings to an angle of between 45 and 180 degrees. Thus Van Gogh the great romantic is transformed into Van Gogh the great mystic!

With the inception of the Internet, the number of Van Gogh fakes on the market has increased beyond control. eBay alone—one of the world's leading online auctioneers—offers dozens of works ascribed to Van Gogh, including an additional version of the ever-popular Sunflowers. Very often, not even the slightest attempt is made at equipping these works with a plausible provenance.

Genuine works in the authenticity debate—a media phenomenon

The day the Van Gogh authenticity debate took on an entirely new aspect can be indicated precisely. On 27 January 1997, the Italian daily Corriere della Sera published an article on the land surveyor Antonio de Robertis. De Robertis, an amateur Van Gogh enthusiast, here maintained that the version of the Sunflowers now in Tokyo, which had hitherto been acknowledged as a genuine Van Gogh beyond any shadow of a doubt, was not authentic. He put forward the theory that this painting, which is unsigned and is not mentioned in the artist's letters, was in fact a copy made by Claude-Émile Schuffenecker. What had triggered De Robertis' doubts was his suspicion that various labels on the reverse side of the canvas and the frame had been either faked or swapped.

Public and private theories

In 1997, Benoît Landais, a French amateur researcher living in the Netherlands, likewise expressed his doubts about the Sunflowers and other Van Gogh works. In

fig. 7

Wheatfield with sheaves (JH 1478)

57 Carlo Bertelli and Flavio Fiorentino, 'Ma queste Girasoli non sono di Van Gogh,' Corriere della Sera (27 January 1997).
58 Martin Bailey, 'At least forty-five Van Goghs may well be fakes,' The Art Newspaper 7 (July-August 1997), p. 1.
59 Cf. Dorn and Felshenfeldt, op. cit. (note 6).
60 At this point in time, the painting had already been publicly declared by the museum as a fake (cf. note 63).
the same year, the British journalist Martin Bailey, writing in the monthly magazine *The Art Newspaper*, reported that at least 43 Van Goghs might well be fakes, including such prominent works as the aforementioned *Sunflowers* and the repetitions of the *Portrait of Dr Gachet* (F 754 JH 2144) and *L'Arlesienne* (F 488 JH 1624).58

Many of the works named in Bailey’s article had already been questioned by other experts. Bailey cited, in addition to Landais, the still unpublished research of Roland Dorn and Walter Feilchenfeldt. This team had already expressed their doubts in 1993 concerning the authenticity of Van Gogh works at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague (F 178 JH 528; F 179 JH 1118; F 286 JH 1127); the Villa Flora Museum in Winterthur (F 222 JH 1108); the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam (F 257 JH 1131); the Detroit Institute of Art (F 245 JH 1123); the Van Gogh Museum (F 255 JH 1121; F 253a JH 1252); the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford (F 268 JH 1299; F 279 JH 1104); the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo (F 278 JH 1105); the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal (F 287 JH 1128); the Fogg Art Museum (F 355 JH 1254); The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (F 365 JH 1255); the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid (F 438 JH 1571); the Nasjonalgalleriet in Oslo (F 528 JH 1701); the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm (F 560 JH 1482); the Musée d’Orsay in Paris (F 655 JH 1801); the Österreichische Galerie in Vienna (F 1672a JH 1544)60 and in private collections (F 255a JH 1128; F 286a JH 1128; F 725 JH 1744; F 796 JH 2110; F - JH 1478). Dorn and Feilchenfeldt have fully substantiated their claims.

The revised edition of Jan Hulsker’s oeuvre catalogue,61 which was published shortly before Bailey’s article, has only added to the confusion. Hulsker places question marks against the catalogue entries of 45 works, but left the issue open as to whether he was querying the authenticity of the respective pictures or merely casting doubt on their hitherto accepted dates. Conversely, various works that have meanwhile been definitively identified as fakes and eliminated from Van Gogh’s oeuvre – such as the *Self portrait in Vienna*62 or the *Still-life with bottle of wine, two glasses and a plate with bread and cheese* (F 255 JH 1121) at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam63 – are still listed as authentic.64 Highly dubious pictures, such as *Wheatfield with sheaves* (fig. 7), which first appeared on the scene in 1972,65 are accepted by Hulsker as genuine without question or hesitation. At least one of the works he catalogues does not even exist.66

The media did their bit to ensure that the fakes debate quickly gathered momentum. In Germany, the art historian Matthias Arnold immediately followed up Landais’s contentions; in the United Kingdom, the journalist Geraldine Norman succeeded in publicising the debate on a national scale. Suddenly, the Van Gogh myth was drawing its sustenance from a completely new source. Art-historical research had apparently exhausted the Van Gogh theme in all its aspects, and in so doing had altogether demystified it: the legend that he had been able to sell just that one famous painting during his lifetime had lost its magic, as had the story of the severed ear and the long-held romantic notion that his lack of success was voluntary, even desired.67 Now Van Gogh had a new secret: evidently, judging by the massive media onslaught of the forgery theorists, many of the works ascribed to him had not been painted by him at all. A new Van Gogh myth was born.

**A media matter**

Thus it was that the debate triggered by De Robertis and Landais was not just an art-historical one. It had a media-sociological component, too. What was essential in this regard was that the roles should be clearly defined: a few

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65 Allegedly originating from Arles, this painting was first shown in 1977 in the exhibition *Choix d’un amateur* at the Galerie Schmit in Paris. The reference to its participation in an exhibition at the Galerie Druet cannot be verified: the quoted number 14 is not illustrated in the catalogue and the title would match dozens of Van Gogh works. Authenticated not only by Jan Hulsker but also by A.M. Hammacher, who last confirmed his opinion in 1990, this painting changed owners several times during the 1980s and 90s. In the spring of 2002, the Amsterdam art dealer Frans Jacobs had to withdraw it from the European Fine Art Fair (TEFAF) in Maastricht owing to the doubts concerning it.

66 The drawing catalogued by Hulsker under the number JH 721 is in fact the verso of the drawing F 1219: the thickly applied ink had come through on the back of the paper.

67 Cf. Marc Edouard Trabattoni, De Gebroeders Van Gogh, Zundert 1964, p. 186, fig. 10

68 Cf. Van Gogh’s letters to Theo; also ‘A great artist is dead’, cit. (note 5); and Louis van Tilborgh, The potato eaters by Vincent van Gogh, Zwolle 1993.
Amsterdam which spoke out regularly in defence of the authenticity of the Sunflowers. The fact that the museum had allowed a new exhibition wing, the cost of which ran into the millions, to be financed by the owner of the painting, the Yasuda Fire & Marine Insurance Company Ltd, completed the conspiracy scenario. Hardly a single journalist has since omitted to insinuate, discreetly or otherwise, that the museum has lost its integrity and impartiality into the millions, to be financed by the owner of the painting.

That the media soon focussed its attention solely on the Sunflowers controversy and, moreover, unquestioningly accepted the theories put forward by De Robertis, Landais and Arnold, is quite astonishing, inasmuch as not a single item of proof has been furnished in the course of the debate so far. De Robertis and Landais have, from the very outset, based their theories purely on circumstantial evidence. Neither has had an opportunity to view the painting in the original. From 1934 until its sale at auction in March 1987, the painting was in the possession of the family of the British mining engineer Chester Beatty. During this period it was loaned to the National Gallery in London on two occasions, from 1955-59 and from 1985-87. While the painting was at the National Gallery, hanging next to the museum’s own version of the Sunflowers (F 454 JH 1561), no material or stylistic examinations were undertaken by any outside researchers. The painting was immediately shipped to Tokyo following its purchase by Yasuda.

The theory that numerous Van Gogh paintings are actually the work of Claude-Emile Schuffenecker – a theory that has likewise been all too willingly endorsed by the media – is still awaiting proof. Two facts alone are indisputable: the Schuffenecker brothers had access to a variety of pictures, and they also made what they considered to be ‘improvements’ to a great many of the paintings that passed through their hands. Judith Gérard-Moline states, for example, that both were responsible for painting out the ‘intrusive’ cat in the foreground of Daubigny’s garden (F 776 JH 2144) and adding grey clouds to Houses at Auvers (F 802 JH 2001). When Ludwig Justi purchased the former for the Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 1929 for over 200,000 Reichsmark, he triggered not only a political controversy but also one of the earliest debates on the authenticity of Van Gogh’s works. Schuffenecker was evidently also responsible for enlarging the canvas of the Tokyo Sunflowers.

However, anyone who saw the Schuffenecker exhibition in Pont-Aven in the autumn of 1956-57 and has since worked his way through the oeuvre catalogue published by Jill-Elyse Grossvogel four years later will realise that, despite the more than scanty information and the poor quality of reproduction in the second publication, Schuffenecker did not even have the ability to produce a fake of the quality found in the version of the Sunflowers under discussion. This observation is further borne out by Schuffenecker’s copy of Van Gogh’s Self-portrait with bandaged ear and pipe (F 529 JH 1658) which is kept at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Artistically, the original and the copy are worlds apart.

The fact that almost all accusations of forgery have been made at times when the works concerned were widely publicised, mostly through sensational auctions or exhibitions, has meant that the media has been able to draw attention to the fakes debate again and again. When the Reader’s Digest Collection came up for auction in November 1998, doubts were expressed concerning the authenticity of the painting Thatched cottages in Jorgus (F 758 JH 2016),75 while on the occasion of the Van Gogh retro-

69 The first opportunity to examine the painting out of its frame was in the spring of 1987, when the former owners delivered it to Christie’s in London for auction. The auction house filmed the examination, carried out only by Christie’s own experts. A copy of the tape is in the author’s possession.

70 Gérard-Moline, op. cit. (note 24).


74 Inv. no. D7377/1974 (Grossvogel 254).

75 Hanspeter Born, ‘Die seltsamen Strohhütten des Reader’s Digest,’ Tages-Anzeiger Zürich (9 November 1998).
perspective in Martigny in 2000, curated by Ronald Pickvance, journalists raised questions on several of the exhibited works.  

One of the biggest stirs was created by a report on the Garden at Auvers, a work that had once before been the focus of public interest. When its owner, Jacques Walter, put it up for auction in Paris in December 1992, the French government declared it a ‘monument classique’ and forbade its export, although it did not assert its right of first refusal. The banker Jean-Marc Vernes thereupon purchased the painting for the relatively small sum of 55 million francs. The French Supreme Court ordered the government to pay Walter’s heirs compensation amounting to 145 million francs.

When four years later it became known that Vernes’s heirs intended to offer the painting for sale, the French press expressed some scepticism – a good two and half months prior to the auction – regarding this unusual painting’s authenticity. Here, too, subjective judgment won out over objective, provable argument, whereupon the painting failed to find a buyer. The owners and the auctioneer have been engaged in a legal battle ever since – notwithstanding the fact that in 1999 experts from the Metropolitan Museum of Art & Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) in 1999.

Museums must react

As the ongoing fakes debate showed no signs of subsiding, by the end of the 1990s several museums felt obligated to react to the various forgery accusations.

In 1999, within the compass of an exhibition on the collection of Dr Gachet held at the Grand Palais, the Musée d’Orsay responded to the charge that Dr Gachet, too, had copied Van Gogh’s works – or had had them copied by his pupil Blanche Derousse – and then passed them off as originals. Between 1949 and 1954, Gachet’s heirs had donated nine paintings, six drawings and an etching by Van Gogh, as well as numerous memorabilia, to the Louvre. This donation included such famous paintings as Self portrait (F 627 JH 1772) and Church at Auvers (F 789 JH 2006). Doubts were expressed, among others, about Cows (after Jordaens) (F 822 JH 2053), which was originally owned by Gachet, and the repetition of the Portrait of Dr Gachet (F 754 JH 1209). However, the Paris show (which later travelled to New York and Amsterdam) and the results of the concurrent examination of the material and style of the exhibited works gave no reason to doubt the authenticity of those works with a Gachet provenance.

Positive, too, was the outcome of the examinations undertaken on The garden of St Paul’s hospital (F 659 JH 1850), which Gachet’s son had donated to the Van Gogh Museum in 1934. Even Theo’s son, Vincent-Willem van Gogh, had expressed his doubts about the picture’s authenticity. However, Louis van Tilborgh was able to prove that it is a genuine variant of the original painting in the Folkwang Museum in Essen (F 660 JH 1850).

Although the Sunflowers controversy had in the meantime quietened down, it was revived again when in the run-up to the exhibition Van Gogh and Gauguin: the studio of the south experts from The Art Institute of Chicago and the Van Gogh Museum were afforded the unique opportunity of examining the Tokyo Sunflowers and its Amsterdam counterpart in detail. The results of this examination were presented by Ella Hendricks and Louis van Tilborgh in a comprehensive study and also presented at a symposium held at the Rijksmuseum in March 2002. The media largely accepted the authors’ conclusions, according to which there was nothing that spoke against, but plenty that spoke in favour of, the authenticity of the Yasuda version. Even Martin Bailey, who had previously allocated a

76 Idem, ‘Der Baron und der falsche Van Gogh,’ Das Magazin 24 (17-23 June 2000), pp. 10-13
78 Paris (Binoche et Godeau), 6 December 1992, lot 7.
79 Important meubles, objets d’art et tableaux modernes, Paris (Binoche et Godeau), 10 December 1996, lot 1.
80 See Alan Franco and Michel Guerne, ‘Jardin à Auvers, le roman tumultueux d’un tableau dans le siècle,’ Le Monde (27 September 1996), p. 25
83 Louis van Tilborgh and Ella Hendricks, ‘Van Gogh’s The garden of St Paul’s hospital: genuine or fake?’ Burlington Magazine 143 (March 2001), pp. 145-58
84 The third version for comparison, from the National Gallery in London, did not join the other two exhibits until the exhibition was shown in Amsterdam. The Yasuda Seye Togo Memorial Yasuda Kasai Museum of Art has still not consented to a full physical and scientific examination of its painting.
great deal of space to the forgery arguments, now wrote: 'Yasuda Sunflowers authentic.'

However, at the same symposium Benoît Landais joined forces with Hanspeter Born in attempting to establish a clumsily executed watercolour as 'Vincent van Gogh's first sunflowers.' No acknowledged Van Gogh expert has hitherto considered this work to be authentic. In addition, Landais has also contributed to efforts at authenticating - and hence rendering marketable - works from the aforementioned Klusmann/Marijssen collection. He is, moreover, the author of a certificate testifying to the authenticity of Two diggers in the afternoon, a painting which, despite its having been attributed to Van Gogh, is generally not recognised as genuine. This work, which the UK-based art dealer Bouwe Jans claims to have discovered at an auction in Groningen on 17 May 1995, and which Hulsker likewise considers to be by Van Gogh's hand, is said to be of Schraudouwen/Cavour provenance. So far nobody has been able to explain why the conspicuous signature 'Vincent' had previously gone unnoticed.

Whilst De Robertis, too, was not unimpressed by the results of the Hendricks and Tilborgh study, he still sticks to his opinion, expressed over the past years with equal vehemence and frequency, that the picture cannot possibly have been painted by Van Gogh; however, during the Amsterdam symposium in March 2002 he did have a change of heart: he now no longer attributes it to Schuffenecker, but rather to Paul Gauguin.

**Positive consequences**

Still, the fakes debate has not been without positive consequences: no matter how unfounded and absurd all the many forgery theories may have seemed, numerous museums have in fact begun to subject their Van Gogh works to critical examination - and with interesting results. In July 1998, The Art Newspaper published a preliminary report according to which 'eighteen Van Goghs' in public collections [...] have been downgraded as fakes or are works of questionable authenticity. Most of them have been taken off display [...]'. The published list tallies largely with the list of works considered dubious five years earlier by Dorn and Feilchenfeldt. The museums named include the Kröller-Müller Museum (F 219 JH 1117; F 240 JH 1155; F 278 JH 1103; F 327 JH 1126; F 724 JH 1745; F 815 JH 2000); the Detroit Institute of Art (F 245 JH 1129); the Wadsworth Atheneum (F 279 JH 1104); the Nasjonalgalleriet in Oslo (F 528 JH 1780); and the Museum of Art in Providence (F 800 JH 2122). Some of the museums cited have themselves in recent years publicised the fact that works originally attributed to Van Gogh may no longer be considered genuine. These are, among others, the Van Gogh Museum (F 114 JH 945; F 215a JH 7; F 215b JH 1205; F 215c JH 7; F 215d JH 7; F 253 JH 1180; F 255 JH 1121; F 255a JH 1252; F 1585e JH 1043; F 1585g JH 1084; F 1586b JH 1015; F 1586c JH 1174; F 14905 JH 1187; F 1716v JH 1074; F 1717 JH 1163); the Von der Heydt Museum (F 287 JH 1121); the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm (F 560 1483); and the Österreichische Galerie in Schloss Belvedere in Vienna (F 16722 JH 1544). The museums are indeed tackling the issue and it would certainly be wrong to say that they are keeping quiet about it.

In 1990, Sotheby's withdrew the painting Street and stairs with five figures (F 798 JH 2110) prior to a planned auction on account of its dubious authenticity. However, three years later, precisely the same auctioneers sold a doubtful Van Gogh - Landscape with church and farms (F 185a JH 761) - the first known owner of which was himself a painter.

Thus the debate on the authenticity of Van Gogh's works as conducted in the public sphere during the past ten years is not first and foremost an art-historical one. Indeed, it has meanwhile become a media-psychological phenomenon in which amateur researchers, scholars and the press have formed an alliance for their mutual benefit: whilst authors use the media as a means of spreading their own fame, the latter uses the ever-new Van Gogh theories put forward by these authors as a way of attracting new readers and viewers.

Correspondingly, little attention has been paid in the past to the results of the academic treatments of the theme - they are evidently too dry and uninteresting. Whereas the press could not get its fill of reports on the suspicions surrounding the Sunflowers, the Garden at Auvers and The garden of St Paul's hospital, the experts' reports testifying to the authenticity of these same works barely received a mention.

**Questions yet to be answered**

This phenomenon can hardly be expected to change very much in the future, either, for Van Gogh's oeuvre will continue to give rise to questions - those concerning the
posthumous changes to his works, for example. Various Van Gogh paintings were altered or retouched after the artist’s death – by whom and for what reason is unknown. Typical examples are *Peat boat with two figures* (F 2141 JH 415), to which a small fence was added at some point, and *Cottage with peasant coming home* (F 170 JH 824), which since being illustrated in De la Faille in 1939 has undergone changes to the cottage roof and to the branches of the tree standing next to it. These changes possibly became necessary after the sky had been retouched.

Other paintings that might also be examined under this aspect are *Peasant woman digging up potatoes* (F 147 JH 891) and *The Nuenen vicarage by moonlight, seen from the garden* (F 183 JH 952). There are early photographs of both paintings showing skies that seem to be different than those featured by the paintings today. Clarification is easier in the case of some of the later paintings that have evidently been altered. Claude-Emile Schuffenecker, for example, is clearly responsible for enlarging the format of the Tokyo Sunflowers and for overpainting the cat in Daubigny’s garden. The apples in *Still life with apples, pears, lemons and grapes* (F 382 JH 1537) may have been added by Edgar Degas, who was one of the very earliest owners of the painting. The still life *Fase with peonies* (F 666a JH 1107), which is untypical of Van Gogh anyway, bears not only a dubious signature but also the year ‘1889,’ while in no way matching a work allegedly produced in Paris; hence, it likewise awaits clarification.

Van Gogh and the questions concerning the origin and authenticity of his works will thus continue to occupy us in the future. The position he holds in the history of art, both as an artist and as a human being, is unique – not least on account of the extraordinarily rapid development of the myth surrounding him.

It is precisely for this reason that the meticulous and scholarly approach of museums and academic institutions will always be called for. Of course – and one does not need to have the gift of prophecy to forecast this – we can also expect to be confronted by even more theories based on circumstantial evidence, assumptions and the seemingly indestructible Van Gogh legend. And the media, too, will continue to spread and celebrate forgery theories, no matter how absurd and unfounded they may be: Van Gogh is always good for a headline, and Van Gogh fakes every time.
Fig. 1
Letter from Gustave Geffroy to Theo van Gogh, 29 May 1888. Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
Paper endures: documentary research into the life and work of Vincent van Gogh

Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Fiete Pabst

The funeral of Vincent van Gogh, held in Auvers-sur-Oise on 29 July 1890, inadvertently launched a worldwide campaign which has yet to be completed: the quest for documents and other historical evidence and testimony that may contribute to our knowledge of the artist's life and work. In the years immediately following Van Gogh's death various individuals began applying themselves to the task of bringing his paintings and drawings to the attention of critics, collectors and the public, while others undertook to promote the publication of the letters, or fragments of them. This allowed a wider audience to become acquainted with the eventful career and epistolary talent of a man who had created a body of unique works of art. In essence, these early efforts set out the two main lines along which subsequent Van Gogh research would develop. More than any other modern artist, Van Gogh has been the subject of biographical studies conducted alongside consideration of his work.

In both these fields the letters have always provided a point of reference and the same holds true for this survey of a number of trends evident over the almost 100 years of research into Van Gogh-related documents. The material is closely interwoven with factors such as the reception of Van Gogh's work, the history of the publication of the letters and the development of the Van Gogh myth. However, these can only be touched on indirectly here, pending publication of the monographs on these subjects that still remain to be written. It will, though, be necessary to consider the history of the Van Gogh Museum, for this institution has gradually secured an important place in documentary research.

Before July 1890

The idea that Van Gogh received no acknowledgement for his work during his lifetime is as tenacious as it is understandable. However, it needs to be qualified. The efforts made to publish extracts from his correspondence immediately following his death would not have been as successful as they were if they had not been preceded by a variety of earlier activities. It is well known that in January 1890 the avant-garde critic Albert Aurier dedicated a favourable article to Van Gogh in the Mercure de France, a journal read by everyone with an interest in modern art. Another admiring critic was J.J. Isaacson, who in De portefeuille of 17 August 1889 described Van Gogh as a promise for the future. However, this journal reached only a relatively limited and entirely Dutch audience; Isaacson's proposed review of Van Gogh's work never appeared, mainly at the insistence of Van Gogh himself.

Bernard was not the only person who sought to draw attention to Van Gogh's correspondence at this early date. Theo regarded the letters as an instrument in generating sympathy for his brother's way of thinking; he must have sensed that their exceptional character could help reduce or even bridge the gap that existed between Vincent's unconventional art and public understanding. A letter to

1 This summary of major research trends cannot be exhaustive, and no attempt will be made in what follows to cite all relevant publications or individuals. The main focus of this article is research that has concentrated on the documents themselves, the historical sources and testimonies – and not therefore on Van Gogh documentation, i.e. the totality of information and data that forms the background against which the letters can be read and the drawings and paintings viewed.

2 Albert Aurier, "Les isolés: Vincent van Gogh," Mercure de France (January 1890), pp. 24-29. Another admiring critic was J.J. Isaacson, who in De portefeuille of 17 August 1889 described Van Gogh as a promise for the future. However, this journal reached only a relatively limited and entirely Dutch audience; Isaacson's proposed review of Van Gogh's work never appeared, mainly at the insistence of Van Gogh himself.

3 See the "Préface" in Emile Bernard, Lettres de Vincent van Gogh à Emile Bernard, Paris 1911, p. 7. Bernard's first meeting with Aurier, described by the artist himself, took place in the spring of 1888.
Theo from the writer and critic Gustave Geffroy illustrates this point – and provides direct proof of the importance of such documents (fig. 1). Evidently Geffroy intended to pen an article on Vincent, for he wrote to Theo on 29 May 1888:


This evident devotion to Vincent is characteristic of Bernard, who also published several articles on the artist and had Vollard produce a richly illustrated, luxury edition of the letters in 1911. Thus, when in 1895 Emile Bernard began publishing passages in the Mercure de France from the letters he himself had received, accompanied by an extensive introduction, he found that some preparatory work had already been done. After four instalments he switched to extracts from Vincent’s letters to his brother, secured through contact with Jo van Gogh-Bonger, the widow of Theo, who had died on 25 January 1891 (fig. 2). By this time she had settled in Bussum in the Netherlands, from where she sent Bernard letters to read and select. These were published at intervals until early 1895, with a ‘final spark’ in August 1897 – probably a deferred contribution to the journal, for Bernard had already returned the borrowed material in June 1896. In the accompanying letter to Jo he had expressed the hope ‘qu’elles soient éditées un jour dignement et en leur entier.’

Moves were thus already afoot on several fronts to obtain recognition for Van Gogh before his death. When Vincent died Theo wanted Aurier to have the honour of being the first critic to devote a more extensive publication to his lamented brother; he informed the critic that other writers had also shown an interest in the subject, which once again indicates that Van Gogh was no longer a complete unknown. On various occasions reference had been made in exhibition reviews to the unusual nature of the artist’s work. Despite the fact that attitudes were sometimes dismissive, at the very least critics who had not already been won over were generally intrigued by its strangeness. Regarding Van Gogh’s early reputation one must also refer to the letters of condolence Theo received in response to Vincent’s death. Although many of the compliments they contain are probably infected with the propensity ‘not to speak ill of the dead,’ almost inevitable in such missives, a sincere appreciation of the artist can nonetheless often be perceived.

**The first publications of the letters**

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decades immediately following the turn of the century.

For his edition Cassirer was able to make use of the letters published in the *Mercure de France* and the first, more extensive publication for a Dutch-speaking public, which had appeared in the August 1895 issue of *Van nu & straks*. This Flemish avant-garde literary journal also reproduced fragments rather than complete letters, mostly chosen from the Dutch period (fig. 4).

As Theo’s widow, Jo had control over all the correspondence and works of art Vincent had sent or left to his brother.\(^\text{10}\) Anyone who wished to see or exhibit his work, or to read or publish his letters, had to apply to Jo. Julius Meier-Graefe, for example, who published his *Entwickelungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* in 1904—a paean to Van Gogh—must have had access to the letters in Jo’s care.\(^\text{11}\) Within her own circle she allowed men of let-

\(^{3}\) This reference to ‘beau-frère’ (brother-in-law) must be a mistake, for in this context Cézanne cannot mean anyone other than Theo’s brother Vincent.

\(^{4}\) Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, b 1199 V/1962

\(^{5}\) Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, b 831 V/1962


\(^{7}\) Published in Ronald Pickvance (ed.), *A great artist is dead: letters of condolence on Vincent van Gogh’s death*, Zwolle & Amsterdam 1992

\(^{8}\) See Bernard, op. cit. (note 3).

\(^{9}\) It is partly chance that has governed which parts of Van Gogh’s correspondence have survived and which have not. Vincent’s letters to Theo from the years 1872-77 were forgotten by the latter when he left home and only came to light again at their mother’s house in August 1890, after Vincent’s death. During preparations for the publication in *Van nu & straks* a package containing a drawing and letters seems to have briefly gone missing, although fortunately it later turned up again.

ters and art critics such as Jan Veth and Frederik van Eeden to read them. At an early stage she herself resolved to publish an edition of the letters, whose exceptional value Theo had recognized already upon Vincent’s death. However, it took her far longer to transcribe, edit and classify the thousands of pages than she had foreseen. On 24 February 1892 she noted in her journal: ‘Now I am going to start on the letters in earnest and with diligence, before the summer rush comes, they have to be ready.’ Initially, therefore, she considerably underestimated the task.

Of course, Jo did not have all the correspondence to hand. Apart from those to Bernard, letters in the possession of third parties included Vincent’s missives to his youngest sister Willemien and Anthon van Rappard. The Dutch journal Kritiek van de bezelende kunsten en kunstnijverheid published letters and extracts from Van Gogh’s exchange with fellow artist Van Rappard throughout the year 1905; the August issue was even devoted entirely to Van Gogh and contained an extensive article by Albert Plasschaert. The Dutch journalist M.J. Persoonli’ke herinneringen an Vincent van Gogh, Munich 1911. The numerous inaccuracies in the book were immediately denounced by Johan de Meester, who appealed to Jo van Gogh-Bonger for support; see J. de Meester, ‘Over kunstenaar-zijn en Vincent van Gogh,’ De Gids 75 (1931), pp. 274-92, in particular the extremely long note, note 6, on pp. 289-92.

14 These and other recollections are brought together in Welsh-Ovcharov and Stiefl, op. cit. (note 6), passim. Among the reminiscences published by Gauguin were those of the time he had spent with Vincent in Arles, which appeared in Avant et après in 1903. Hartrick looked back in ‘Post-impressionism: with some personal recollections of Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin,’ published in The Imprint in May 1913; this article had limited distribution, however, and his memories only became better known when they were reprinted in A painter’s pilgrimage in Berlin (1905); and the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne (1911).

Van Gogh’s increasing renown was followed by the familiar phenomenon of people dredging up recollections of famous figures they had once known. In 1910 Vincent’s own sister, Elisabeth (Lies), published her Persoonlijke herinneringen, which instantly introduced into the growing Van Gogh myth all kinds of hard-to-verify assertions regarding the artist’s youth. Details of various episodes of Van Gogh’s life were further revealed by individuals such as his former roommate in Dordrecht, F.C. Görlich, his teacher M.B. Mendes da Costa, his pupil A. Kerssemakers, and artist colleagues like A.S. Hartrick and Paul Gauguin. Others retraced Van Gogh’s steps, searching for places and people who had played a role in his life. The Dutch journalist M.J. Brusse interviewed residents of Dordrecht, the Belgian Louis Piarard tracked down Van Gogh’s movements in the Borinage and Antwerp.

Consequently, in 1914 Jo’s three-volume edition of the letters to Theo, published simultaneously in German translation, fell on the most fertile soil imaginable. She could now finally lay down the colossal burden she had assumed after Theo’s death: her mission was complete. Regarding the late date of publication she wrote in the foreword – somewhat contradicting her original intentions, expressed in the years immediately following 1890, that she wished to publish the letters quickly: ‘It would have been a disservice to the deceased [Vincent], to have aroused interest in his person before the work to which he gave his life was acknowledged and appreciated as it deserved. Many years
passed before Vincent was acknowledged as a painter; now one can come to know and understand him as a person. 18

Jo's introduction was also the first more extensive biography of the artist to be based on reliable sources. Although we now know it contains various errors and omissions, this outline of the artist's life was certainly a good start given the resources then available. The task of supplementing and correcting the material could now begin. Unfortunately the timing of the publication was all wrong; in August the First World War broke out, completely disrupting Europe for years to come. However, work was quickly resumed in the 1920s.

Between two editions

The decades that followed produced a steadily growing stream of information and publications largely along the lines that had already been laid out, with details on Van Gogh's life and works supplemented by research in situ. In 1928 Benno Stokvis wrote an account of his search for references to Van Gogh in the various places in Brabant where the artist had lived and worked. Gustave Coquiot and Piérard also conducted research at various locations for their highly influential biographies, published during the 1920s; this, however, does not alter the fact that their books have not proved entirely reliable. 19 Both authors were evidently driven by an admiration for the artist bordering on adoration. In his 'Avant-propos,' for example, Piérard boasted that he had made a copy of Van Gogh's death certificate while in Auvers-sur-Oise and spoken to the artist's fellow students from the Antwerp art academy; 'Partout, j'ai voulu mettre "mes pas dans ses pas."' 20 Coquiot took a similar approach, visiting such individuals as the son of Paul Gachet, who had placed 'les plus sûrs et les plus rares des documents' at his disposal. 21

Although several further successful attempts were made to encourage people from Van Gogh's milieu to speak out, the number of informants naturally diminished over the years. 22 At this point virtually no one was aware of the existence of the rather substantial body of correspondence exchanged between other members of the Van Gogh family. But the editions of Vincent's letters to Bernard and Theo naturally prompted the question of whether or not there was more; in this area at least there was still great progress to be made. During the 1920s and 1930s Van Gogh's surviving correspondence was augmented with the sporadic publication of his letters to Paul Gauguin, Paul Signac, Joseph and Marie Ginoux, John Peter Russell and Arnold Koning. 1952 saw the publication of Theo's letters to Vincent, followed in 1956 by an English translation of Vincent's letters to Anton van Rappard, the original Dutch version of which appeared a year later.

In the meantime, efforts had been made to define Vincent van Gogh's entire oeuvre. The first edition of J.-B. de la Faille's catalogue was published in early 1928. An important event in itself, it is also self-evident that De la Faille made proper use of the available correspondence when making his identifications. Simultaneously, however, an international discussion arose concerning the authenticity of a large number of works attributed to Van Gogh – attributions made by De la Faille himself in his capacity as intermediary/dealer, and also by others. This eventually led to the notorious Wacker trials, 23 at which documents naturally served

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18 Ibid., p. vi.
19 Benno J. Stokvis, Nasponingen omtrent Vincent van Gogh in Brabant, Amsterdam 1926; Gustave Coquiot, Vincent van Gogh, Paris 1923; and Louis Piérard, La vie tragique de Vincent van Gogh, Paris 1924
as evidence, and Vincent Willem van Gogh (1890–1978), Jo and Theo’s son, referred to the inherited papers in the family’s possession when appearing as a witness. Personal documents were thus shown to contain information that was essential to provenance-related research.

1952-54: Collected letters
Vincent Willem van Gogh also edited the bulky edition of Van Gogh’s letters that marked the 100th anniversary of the artist’s birth and that would form a defining moment in Van Gogh scholarship. The four volumes of the *Verzamelde brieven* were published successively in the years 1952–54. Although the 1914 publication provided the nucleus, V.W. van Gogh restored a large number of passages that ‘had previously been omitted for one reason or another.’ This edition also contained the letters to Van Gogh’s artist friends and people from his circle that had previously appeared in various publications and journals in a range of countries. Substantial supplementary material included 21 mostly undated or incomplete letters and fragments addressed to Theo, mainly from Vincent’s time in Nuenen, plus 22 letters to Willemien. V.W. van Gogh also managed to bring a number of previously unpublished missives to light. Several fine sketches from Vincent’s letters were included as illustrations.

For both art historians and the now-large public interested in Van Gogh it was extremely useful to have access to the artist’s total correspondence. But the publication was of additional merit in that it also incorporated many of the documents mentioned above, as well as much of the documentary information published over the preceding decades. To some extent passages were inserted according to the period with which they were associated, while others were placed together at the end of the fourth volume, as a kind of supplement. In addition to the published material – taken both from newspapers and journals and from independent publications and studies, ‘the Engineer,’ as V.W. van Gogh was sometimes known, also included his own notes on a diverse range of subjects connected with his uncle, Vincent, and his father, Theo. The broad scope of the book ensured that V.W. van Gogh, who wrote that he had made grateful use of his mother’s newspaper cuttings, fully met his aim, which he had formulated as follows: ‘Finally I point out, that this edition is exclusively documentary in character;’ and: ‘Vincent’s character must come to the fore in all its aspects.’ This edition was reprinted several times and translated in its entirety into languages that included English (1958), Italian (1959), French (1960), German (1965) and Japanese (1969); naturally these translations gave rise to a multitude of anthologies in even more languages. It would therefore be difficult to overstate the influence of this centennial publication; it represented the culmination of Van Gogh-related knowledge at the time and would become an abundant source of research material for decades to come. As a pendant to J.-B. de la Faille’s catalogue raisonné, it may unreservedly be described as the most important Van Gogh source of the 20th century.

A monumental edition may sometimes prove the final word on a particular subject and the author’s reputation; in the case of the Dutchman who by now had evolved into an icon of modern art, however, this new compilation had exactly the opposite effect, pointing the way to a large area of fallow ground awaiting cultivation. Jan Hulsker has become the embodiment of all that could be harvested here. Driven by an ambition to set as many facts as possible about Van Gogh’s life in their precise context, from the 1950s onwards he tirelessly devoted himself to studying the letters. This intensive investigation was greatly facilitated

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26 These 22 letters had come into V.W. van Gogh’s possession after Willemien’s death in 1941, together with a letter to her from the postman Joseph Roulin, dated 8 January 1889, that mentions Vincent (W10).

27 V.W. van Gogh also included a biographical article he had written about his mother, as well as two articles that had been published on the occasion of her death on 2 September 1925; see *Verzamelde brieven*, cit. (note 25), vol. 4, pp. 243-53. In addition to the supplements on various periods in Vincent’s life, the documentary section also provided a sketch of the Van Gogh family’s ancestry, based in part on a ‘family history’ written by an aunt.

28 Ibid., vol. 1, p. w. and vol. 2, p. 5.

29 Hulsker’s research into the dating of the letters ultimately resulted in Vincent van Gogh: a guide to his work and letters, Zwolle 1993.
by the privilege V.W. van Gogh accorded him of examining the family documents before these were housed in a public collection. Hulsker’s dating of the letters – various proposed adjustments by later researchers notwithstanding – is still the foundation on which Van Gogh’s biography rests. He published new documents, such as the important letters written to Theo by Reverend Salles and Dr Peyron from Arles and Saint-Rémy, and the passages concerning Vincent in Theo’s exchange of letters with his parents. Hulsker subjected various episodes of Van Gogh’s life to critical scrutiny, and connected passages in the letters to his drawings and paintings where possible. His insights were published in many articles in books and journals.


The Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the Van Gogh Museum

The collected edition of Van Gogh’s letters exemplified V.W. van Gogh’s efforts to promote his uncle’s reputation and knowledge of his oeuvre. But he accomplished still more groundbreaking work. His father, Theo van Gogh, a great hoarder, had kept not only Vincent’s correspondence but also the letters he had received from his parents, sisters, brother Cor, aunts, uncles, art dealers and friends, including other artists. After his death, Jo van Gogh-Bonger was left with hundreds of paintings, drawings, prints and letters. These officially became the possession of her son Vincent Willem when Theo’s mother, sisters and brother renounced their claim to his estate in July 1891. As the legal guardian of her minor son, Jo was empowered to administer the collection. The works of art by Vincent’s contemporaries (the so-called ‘non-Van Goghs’), however, were the joint property of Jo herself and Vincent Willem. On Jo’s death Vincent Willem became owner of all the works, which he intended to keep together. Initially, his interest in them was not very great, as he was busy pursuing his own career as a technical engineer. Nevertheless, in 1930 he agreed to lend most of the paintings and drawings to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

It was not until after the war that he became more actively involved. In 1962 the Vincent van Gogh Foundation was established in order to preserve the group as a whole. The state paid Vincent Willem 18,470,000 guilders for the collection – comprising the works of art and most of the important documents and archive material – ownership of which was then transferred to the foundation. Following his retirement in 1965, Vincent Willem devoted himself entirely to the Van Gogh legacy. He described his objective in 1957: ‘My role is namely to bring together for the Vincent van Gogh Foundation everything connected with the painter.’ His extensive correspondence with individuals and institutions all over the world shows how seriously he took this task (fig. 3).

The key documents in the collection are of course the circa 800 letters written by and to Vincent van Gogh, and the other manuscripts by his hand. But there is also Theo’s other correspondence and the letters exchanged between various members of the Van Gogh and Bonger


31 Jan Hulsker, Van Gogh door Van Gogh: De brieven als commentaar op zijn werk, Amsterdam 1973. In this book, ‘all statements that can be found in the letters concerning paintings, drawings and lithographs [Van Gogh] intended to make, on which he was working, which he had sent or about which he had something to say in another connection, have been brought together in their entirety’ (p. 6). The letter sketches were also reproduced.

32 Vincent suggested to Theo, ‘Il serra peut-être intéressant de garder la correspondance des artistes’ [591/474]. He failed to follow his own advice, however, and hundreds of letters addressed to him have been lost.


34 Ibid., V.W. van Gogh to P. Fagel, 13 March 1967, b7144 V/1996
VAN GOGH MUSEUM

fig. 5
V.W. Van Gogh in 1957, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

V.W. van Gogh’s efforts were crowned in 1973 when the Van Gogh Museum – then called the ‘Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh’ – was opened in Amsterdam. Here the Vincent van Gogh Foundation deposited its works of art and documents on permanent loan. In addition to displaying an art collection that became a public attraction enjoying worldwide renown, the founding of the new museum also led to the establishment of a library and documentation centre, a centre that may be regarded as the most comprehensive in its field. Moreover, *Vincent: Bulletin of the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, a periodical issued by the museum during the 1970s, was specifically intended to open up research into the documents. Published from 1970-77, it also featured substantial contributions by Jan Huiskes. The articles contained a great deal of new information, often derived from sources not previously studied or published.

During the museum’s early years access to the documents was determined to a considerable degree by V.W. van Gogh and, later, by his son Johan; as respective chairmen of the foundation, they decided whether to accede to requests to inspect or study various materials. Following V.W. van Gogh’s death in 1978 a large number of new documents were transferred to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation but remained under embargo, creating the impression that certain matters were deliberately being kept from the outside world. Nevertheless many eminent scholars enjoyed good relations with the foundation and the museum; in many instances they were given the opportunity to use controlled information in their publications. Noteworthy results were the facsimile edition of Vincent’s letters from the years after his arrival in France and the collection of Paul Gauguin’s letters to Theo, Vincent and Jo.


37 Some documents also left the collection. On 24 May 1984 the Vincent van Gogh Foundation donated 27 letters addressed to Jo van Gogh-Bonger to the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG) in Amsterdam. These had been written by friends and in-
The 1990s: increasing access

In 1986 Ronald de Leeuw became director of the Van Gogh Museum. He launched a programme to modernise and professionalise the institution, his ambition being to develop it into a more broad-based museum of the 19th century and a leading centre for Van Gogh research. During the years 1991-96 the transfer of documents from the foundation’s archives to the museum was finally completed and a number of important publications appeared, edited both by museum staff and external scholars. Examples include the edition of the surviving poetry albums compiled by Van Gogh, which shed light on his favourite reading material during his youth; the letters of condolence Theo received following Vincent’s death; and the correspondence between Theo and Jo.39

The 1990 edition of the letters must also be mentioned in this connection.40 Commemorative years have always produced a stream of publications, which in turn have stimulated further research. This was the case in 1955, when the 100th anniversary of Van Gogh’s birth was celebrated, and again on the 100th anniversary of his death. Since the publication of the artist’s collected letters in the 1930s more than 50 new missives had come to light. In 1990 Van Gogh’s entire correspondence was for the first time placed in chronological order, renumbered and accorded the most recent dating.41 All the letter sketches were reproduced in this new publication, again a four-volume work, which is currently the most complete edition of Van Gogh’s correspondence. However, it was intended as a popular edition, with all the letters printed in modern Dutch – the ones in French in translation – so that an international public hardly profited from these advances in research.

De Leeuw also managed to further diminish the foundation’s reluctance to make documents from the family archives available for study. In 1995 the embargo mentioned above was partially lifted, the rest following in November 2000, although certain rules still govern the inspection of documents. This has opened the way for new research into provenance and the history of the collection.

In all objectivity it may thus be concluded that the Van Gogh Museum has now become the primary centre for research into Van Gogh-related sources. The institution also houses a library of some 25,000 books, around 5,000 of which are exclusively devoted to Van Gogh. These include the foundation’s volumes and V.W. van Gogh’s own library. Since 1996 the library and documentation department have been housed in a building next to the museum (Museumplein 4).42

A conspicuous trend in research during the 1980s and 90s was the growing scrutiny of archives for information relating to the various places where Van Gogh had lived and worked. This research was mainly conducted by art historians, especially those in search of material for exhibitions and associated catalogues. Increasing numbers of contemporary photographs and postcards were retrieved, the emphasis lying on the exact locations where Van Gogh had drawn or painted and the standpoints and viewing angles he would have taken. Such reconstructions have made it possible to identify certain locations more precisely or correct existing notions regarding them. Scholars such as Marc Edo Tralbaut and John Rewald had already undertaken similar initiatives in earlier years. A pioneering work in this field, however, was Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov’s dissertation, which systematically reconstructed Van Gogh’s Paris period and formed the basis for the catalogue that ac-


40 Feike Pabst (ed.), Vincent van Gogh’s poetry albums, Zwolle 1988; ‘A great artist is dead,’ St. (note 7); and Han van Cleempen (ed.), Kort geluk: De briefwisseling tussen Theo van Gogh en Jo Boerger, Amsterdam & Zwolle 1999 (English edition: Brief happiness. The correspondence of Theo van Gogh and Jo Boerger), published after De Leeuw’s departure as director, but at his instigation.


42 Much of the dating was based on the insights of Jan Hulsker, with due regard for suggestions made particularly by Ronald Pickvance and Roland Dorn, who had thoroughly studied the letters and their dates, especially for the 1888-90 period.

Van Gogh Museum

fig. 6.
P.W. de Zwart (1826–1905) (photograph by D.S. van Dorsser Keus, Utrecht)

fig. 7.
M.A. de Zwart (1853–1922) (photograph by D.S. van Dorsser Keus, Utrecht)

companied the exhibition *Van Gogh à Paris.* Another name that should be mentioned in this connection is that of Ronald Pickvance, whose catalogues devoted to Van Gogh’s Arles, Saint-Rémy and Auvers periods have become part of the standard literature. Characteristic of the approach taken by Welsh-Ovcharov and Pickvance in sorting and classifying Van Gogh’s oeuvre is not only their greater attention to the relationships between drawings and paintings, but also their reconsideration of the available documents and other sources, specifically their transcription and dating. Roland Dorn took a similarly critical tack to the documents in his book *Décoration*, in which he made numerous corrections to the dating of the letters in the process of reconstructing part of Van Gogh’s production in Arles. Druick and Zegers confirmed the continuing productivity of research *in situ* with their recent catalogue, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the studio of the south*, published in 2001.

These examinations of Van Gogh’s French period were supplemented by a revival, possibly inspired by the enormous publicity surrounding the Van Gogh anniversary in 1990, of mainly Dutch researchers following the artist’s trail in their own surroundings. Much new information has emerged, often found in local authority and provincial archives, regarding Van Gogh’s contacts, in particular the identification of a number of models and the places where he stayed. Although such findings were often published in local periodicals, they sometimes found their way to a wider group of scholars and interested parties when incorporated into independent publications, such as those recently produced by De Brouwer and Dijk/Van der Stuijs.

**The future: moving forward**

After close on a century of Van Gogh studies the literature on the artist has grown to truly immense proportions. Nevertheless research continues apace, for the value of new, additional information partly lies in the questions raised. Furthermore, the number of still-unanswered questions is well-nigh endless, while documentary sources and archives are far from having been exhaustively examined.
What does the near future hold for document and archive research? Strictly document-oriented research is the guiding principle in the preparation for the new, annotated edition of Van Gogh's letters, a project instigated by Ronald de Leeuw and begun in 1994. The irony of advances in scholarship is that the initiatives inspired by the publications of 1952-53 and 1990 have resulted in the exposure of errors and omissions in these very editions, and the pinpointing of new desiderata. Study of original manuscripts for the future compilation of Van Gogh's letters has already demonstrated that numerous corrections can still be made to the previous editions, so that the new text will be more authentic in appearance. In many instances dating can be considerably tightened and even on occasion drastically amended. Notes accompanying the letter texts are an innovation in themselves. They will contain all relevant information on literature, biography and art and cultural history, thereby bridging the gulf between the contemporary reader/researcher and the writer/addressee of 120 years ago. Naturally, this information is partly based on the range of articles, studies and catalogues produced to date by other scholars, so that to some degree the notes will reflect the current state of research in the field of Van Gogh studies.

The edition will be published in English, but will include the original Dutch or French letter texts alongside the translation. Research for the new edition has already repeatedly revealed that it would be a mistake to assume that all documents relating to Van Gogh have now been ferreted out: at regular intervals new items still turn up, old ones are rediscovered. A very recent example is the donation of photographs of Van Gogh's letters to his landlord in The Hague, Pieter Willem de Zwart (1826-1905). Although the original letters are in an unknown private collection, thanks to one of De Zwart's descendants we now have a reliable text and dating for a letter previously known only from a transcript, plus a number of portrait photographs of De Zwart and his son Michiel Antonie (1853-1922), who managed his father's rental affairs. Of an entirely different order and extremely gratifying is the fact that recently it became possible for the first time in 70 years to make an extensive study of De Zwart's descendants we now have a reliable text and dating for a letter previously known only from a transcript.

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36 This is letter 2317. With thanks to Mr and Mrs van Dorsser Keus-De Zwart, Utrecht.
study of Van Gogh’s original letters to Emile Bernard. The new edition of Van Gogh’s correspondence will thus contain a much more accurate version of these texts than has previously been available. Sources of information ‘around’ Van Gogh have also apparently yet to run dry: offered for sale at a recent Paris auction were letters addressed by various individuals to Theo in his capacity as manager for Boussod, Valadon & Cie in Paris, one of which contains a reference to his brother.52

The future: desiderata

Now that the foundation’s archives have been made fully accessible, provenance-related research can also be supplemented by interesting material for which the art historical community has yearned for many years. Back in 1988 Walter Feilchenfeldt provided an initial impulse with his book on the Berlin art dealer Paul Cassirer.53 Thanks to these new research opportunities, this issue of the Journal will be accompanied by the publication of the account book of Theo van Gogh and Jo van Gogh-Bonger—a document containing a wealth of information on sales of works from the family art collection. The account book offers insights into Theo and Jo’s approach when selling the works, the buyers and the prices paid.54 Another document awaiting study and publication is the so-called ‘Bonger list,’ an early inventory of Van Gogh’s works in Theo and Jo’s Paris apartment, compiled by Jo’s brother Andries Bonger. Correspondence by other individuals also remains unexplored, awaiting further investigation.

Recent studies of the galleries where Van Gogh’s work was bought and sold demonstrate how useful it is to chart the sale of works and the network of buyers, collectors and dealers.55 Comprehensive examinations of the archives of influential art dealers such as Durand-Ruel, Vollard and Wildenstein is a particularly high priority for Van Gogh scholars. Given the relatively short history of research into this field, much archive-based and document-related work remains to be done.

The notes in the new edition of Van Gogh’s letters will contain extensive quotations from the family correspondence kept in the museum. However, researchers would undoubtedly also find it useful to have greater access to this part of the collection; electronic media may prove the most suitable means, being cheaper and relative-
Gogh’s intriguing history of illness. The passage comes from a letter written by Vincent’s mother in Leiden to Theo, on 29 December 1888 (fig. 9), several days after Vincent had cut off part of his ear in Arles. Referring to earlier times, she writes: ‘Oh Theo, if it’s confirmed, you remember Prof. Ramaar in The Hague, don’t you, when Father really wanted to go with him as a neuropath, and Vincent declared he was willing to ask for medicines and at the moment they were to leave refused to go and Father went anyway to tell him. [Prof. Ramaar] said what I’m now hearing, something is lacking or wrong in the cerebellum. The event referred to probably occurred in 1879 or 1880. ‘Professor Ramaar’ was Johannes Nicolaas Ramaer (1817–1887), a leading psychiatrist in The Hague and one of the founders of mental health care in the Netherlands. He sought to establish a scientific approach to psychiatry in which disorders were interpreted as the result of physical processes in the body. The reference to ‘the cerebellum’ strongly indicates that Ramaer regarded Vincent’s symptoms as a purely physical condition and not primarily psychosomatic in nature.

Immediately after Vincent van Gogh’s death Paul Gauguin wrote to Theo to express his condolences. In this letter he includes a saying Vincent apparently quoted often, and which can be interpreted as symbolic of the import of documents as historical evidence: ‘La pierre pétrifiée, la parole restera.’ We cannot say when we will have found the last word, but a century of research has demonstrated that it is still worth the effort to keep searching.

52 Sale Paris (Hôtel Drouot), 2 July 2002, lot 65
53 Walter Feilchenfeldt (with Han Veenenbos), Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cassirer, Berlin: the reception of Van Gogh in Germany from 1901 to 1914, Zwolle 1988.
54 Chris Stolwijk and Han Veenenbos, The account book of Theo van Gogh and Jo van Gogh-Bonger, Leiden 2002. The account book can also play a role in debates on authenticity.
57 With thanks to Erik Fokke, Amsterdam.
58 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Paul Gauguin to Theo van Gogh, Le Pouldu, 2 August 1890, b 1481 V/1962. See also ‘A great artist is dead,’ cit. (note 7), p. 133.
Vincent van Gogh, The Yellow House in Arles (F 464 JH 1589), 1888, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
The Van Gogh literature from 1990 to the present: a selective review

Ann Dumas

The aim of this article is to provide a review of the Van Gogh literature over the last dozen years. Given the vast body of writings produced since 1990, however, it is by necessity highly selective. I have only attempted to cover what one may call the 'standard' literature, although a variety of art-historical methodologies are represented. I have sought to trace in broad lines what I see as the major trends in Van Gogh scholarship – in the past decade, but also for the near future. My approach to the books, catalogues and articles examined is not so much critical as descriptive, providing the reader with a general introduction to the authors and their ideas. Although works on Van Gogh have been published in many languages, I have also chosen to concentrate almost exclusively on the literature in English.

It is a notorious irony of Van Gogh's career that the commercial and critical neglect he suffered in life was dispelled almost immediately after his death. The first appreciative article on his work, 'Les isolés: Vincent van Gogh,' by the young symbolist writer and critic Albert Aurier, had in fact appeared a few months before the artist's death. From that point onward the artist's popularity, and the concomitant creation of a Van Gogh myth based on his unrivaled status as the archetypal artiste maudit, gathered momentum at an unrelenting pace. Aurier's text proclaimed the independent value of the paintings themselves and rejected both a biographical approach to Van Gogh's art and a contextual one, which would have the works viewed as products of a given period and milieu. However, the inescapable drama of Van Gogh's brief and turbulent life, ending with his suicide in July 1890, and the vast self-revelatory testament he left behind in the form of his letters, ensured that the biographical approach predominated in much of the early literature. Writing in 1950, Griselda Pollock noted: 'The largest section of VG [Van Gogh] publications are those monographic studies simply entitled Van Gogh, with a portrait or self-portrait on the cover.' The German critic Julius Meier-Graefe extended his critical appraisal of Van Gogh to writing a novel based on the artist's life, Vincent: Der Roman eines Gottsuchers (1952), one of a number of German fictional accounts of the artist. The ultimate popular biography of Van Gogh was, of course, the American writer Irving Stone's Lust for Life, published in 1935. With the making of Vincent Minelli's film based on Stone's book in 1955 Van Gogh arrived in Hollywood.

A number of psychoanalytical studies attempting to pinpoint the roots of Van Gogh's 'madness' arose from this biographical bias. As Pollock observed: 'These [biographies], with the proliferating essays of psychologistic and psycho-symbolic interpretations, far outnumber the relatively scarce studies of aspects of an artistic practice.'

The more recent literature has considerably redressed this balance. Time has provided a greater distance from the subject. Over the last decades scholars have brought more objective and systematic art-historical

3 Griselda Pollock, 'Artists, mythologies and media: genius, madness and art history, Screen 21 (1980), no. 3, p. 66. See also, more recently, the essays in Tsukasa Kôdera and Yvette Rosenberg (eds.), The mythology of Vincent van Gogh, Tokyo, Amsterdam & Philadelphia 1991.
4 See, for example, K. Jaspers, Strindberg and Van Gogh, Leipzig 1922 and F. Minkowska, 'Van Gogh: les relations entre sa vie, sa maladie et son œuvre,' L’Évolution Psychiatrique 3 (1953), discussed in Pollock, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 71-74
5 Pollock, op. cit. (note 3), p. 66
methodology to bear on the different periods of Van Gogh’s career, particular subjects, or aspects of his technique and style. Contrary to Aurier’s prescription, a number of more recent studies have broadened the debate beyond the works themselves, rescuing Van Gogh from the role of isolated, tormented genius and exploring his art and his writing in relation to late 19th-century social, cultural and philosophical issues.

Overviews

A number of recent museum catalogues and other publications (including the many articles that have appeared in the *Van Gogh Museum Journal*) have given us a more extensive and secure body of facts on Van Gogh’s work than existed before, with regard to dating, style, technique and, in some cases, attribution. A methodical, empirical approach characterises the two catalogues that accompanied the major exhibition held in 1990 to mark the centenary of Van Gogh’s death, at the beginning of the period here under review. This exhibition was mounted at the Van Gogh Museum and the Kröller-Müller Museum, the two institutions having the largest holdings of Van Gogh’s work. Divided into two parts (the paintings were displayed in Amsterdam and the drawings in Otterlo) the shows brought together a spectacular selection, comprising 153 paintings and 248 drawings from all periods of Van Gogh’s career. The two-volume catalogue draws on new and thorough research, focusing attention on the works themselves. In the paintings catalogue, Louis van Tilborgh gives a succinct overview in his introductory essay, and the substantial and informative catalogue entries by Van Tilborgh, Evert van Uttert and Sjraar van Heugten provide a wealth of material on the making of the works and their chronological ordering.

The particular achievement of the exhibition’s curators was, however, to give full weight to the drawings and their relationship to the paintings. Until the 1980s, the drawings had received scant attention. Johannes van der Wolk’s essay, ‘Van Gogh the draughtsman at his best,’ explores the complex and shifting patterns of creation between the paintings and drawings. Van Gogh’s letters often contain detailed discussions not only of individual drawings but also of the groups and series to which they belonged. The exhibition reflected these groupings – of anatomical studies, figures as types, figures at rest, figures in action, the topography and life of the town. Looking at the post-Paris period, Ronald Pickvance systematically analyses the relationship between paintings and the drawings and establishes four categories: drawings that are independent of paintings, shared motifs, paintings made from drawings and a category special to Van Gogh, drawing made after paintings. E.B.F. Pey, taking a poetic title from Van Gogh’s letters, ‘Chalk the colour of ploughed-up land on a summer evening,’ examines the artist’s drawing materials, a subject hitherto virtually ignored by scholars. Attributing this lacuna to the fact that drawing materials are often difficult to identify with the naked eye, Pey analyses 40 drawings in the exhibition, concluding that Van Gogh first mastered conventional techniques such as chalk and charcoal, but then experimented with more unusual media such as Italian chalk.

In 1996 a revised edition of Jan Hulsker’s 1977 catalogue appeared. Hulsker acknowledges and builds on the immense pioneering work of J.-B. de la Faille, who brought out the first catalogue raisonné of Van Gogh’s work in 1928. De la Faille divided the oeuvre into two parts, paintings and drawings, but Hulsker re integrates it in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the chronology and Van Gogh’s practice. The advantage of Hulsker’s method is that it allows him to group works that clearly belong together and that were made at the same time, drawings with paintings, as well as the variants and sketches in the letters. Inevitably, references in the letters provide an essential aid to chronology and dating. Hulsker’s achievement of placing more than 2,100 illustrations of works in a tentative chronological order has provided an invaluable basis for subsequent catalogues and chronologies of the work.

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9 A catalogue of Van Gogh’s complete graphic work has also been published: Sjraar van Heugten and Fieke Pabst, *The graphic work of Vincent van Gogh*, Zwolle 1995.
Despite these obvious merits, however, Hulsker’s book is not without its problems. It is far from being the long hoped-for catalogue raisonné, as he mentions no sources, provides the reader with only the most summary information about technique (particularly with regard to the drawings) and makes no mention of provenances. There are also numerous errors in the locations of the works. Perhaps most damaging, and confusing, however, is his ambiguous use of question marks, whereby it remains unclear whether the author is questioning his own assumptions about dating or the work’s very authenticity.

As a first step in the compilation of a true catalogue raisonné, the Van Gogh Museum has recently embarked on a major scholarly initiative with a series of new and splendidly produced catalogues of the paintings and drawings in their collection. To date, the first of the four paintings catalogues and three of the four catalogues devoted to the drawings have appeared. Although these exemplary compilations deal only with the collections of the Van Gogh Museum, their methodology and wealth of documentation provide a context and an invaluable tool that can be applied to Van Gogh’s oeuvre in general.

More than 200 paintings survive from Van Gogh’s Dutch period. Vincent Van Gogh: paintings. Vol. 1: Dutch period, 1881-1885, written by Louis van Tilborgh and Marije Vellekoop, documents the 44 paintings from this period in the Van Gogh Museum’s collection.10 The catalogue makes available new and valuable information on Van Gogh’s early period, which has traditionally been overshadowed by his more dazzling later production. The catalogue follows a different structure from volume one, grouping the numerous studies of hands, heads and figures of weavers Van Gogh made in Nuenen in order to demonstrate their ‘essentially autodidactic qualities’13 and Van Gogh’s quest for an archetypal peasant type. The third volume examines the 116 drawings the artist executed in Antwerp and Paris. In both cities, Van Gogh attended academic art classes, as demonstrated by his dozens of figurative studies. These rarely seen, often awkward works provide new insight into Van Gogh’s development and his understanding of the human figure.

The letters

Van Gogh occupies a special position as an artist/writer. No other painter in recent history has written so extensively, so personally or so directly about his art, his feelings, his reading, his religious and philosophical views as Van Gogh. The letters are thus a crucial part of the primary source material on the artist. In addition to the cataloguing of their paintings and drawings, the Van Gogh

11 Ibid., p. 6.
Museum, together with the Constantijn Huygens Institute for Text Editions and Intellectual History, The Hague, has embarked on a major research project on the letters. Currently, the standard edition of the letters is the four-volume set in the original languages, compiled by V.W. van Gogh and published in the early 1950s, which was translated into English in 1958 and French in 1960, and recently reprinted in English. An updated, entirely Dutch edition, including new letters and previously omitted passages, appeared in 1990. This was followed in 1996 by a selection in English edited by Ronald de Leeuw. The ‘evidence’ in the letters is, of course, neither objective nor transparent, but Leo Jansen and Hans Luijten of the Van Gogh Museum are now engaged in an exhaustive re-examination of all aspects of the correspondence, which will shed new light on a great many complex matters and questions. A recent exhibition presented some of their findings to the public for the first time.

Van Gogh’s literary and artistic heroes
Van Gogh steeped himself in literature and in art. His letters reveal the broad spectrum of his reading and his love of the artists who inspired him. Since 1990 a number of studies have appeared that have considerably deepened our knowledge of Van Gogh and his artistic and literary heroes.

The first comprehensive study was that of Judy Sund, published in 1992. Although Van Gogh’s reading material has been discussed frequently in the subsequent literature, Sund’s book remains the most intelligent and extensive investigation of the subject. Sund explains how Van Gogh became caught up in the vogue for contemporary French literature that was prevalent in artistic and intellectual circles during his time in The Hague. His favourite author was without a doubt Emile Zola. As Sund’s title infers, Van Gogh shared Zola’s fundamental belief in individual temperament as a creative force, and she explains the exaggerated form and colour in his paintings in terms of a need to express the ‘emotion of an ardent temperament.’ Van Gogh, Sund argues, was drawn to writers who addressed social issues partly because he rejected the organised religion of his upbringing, finding greater solace in the more general humanism expounded by certain 19th-century novelists and philosophers. Literature also filled an emotional gap in Van Gogh’s personal life: ‘Chronic difficulties in achieving and maintaining intimate relations of all sort seem to have encouraged his reliance on books for advice, solace and surrogate companionship,’ Sund explains. She goes on to suggest that reading ‘enriched the imaginative life of this solitary man with a deep, inner reservoir of feeling and associations that fed the heightened, poetic quality that distinguishes his paintings.’ She is particularly effective in demonstrating how literature acted as a touchstone for the artist, one to which he constantly referred to interpret and shape his life — whether in his relationship with the prostitute Sien, or in his fantasy constructions of Provence.

The exhibition Van Gogh in England: portrait of the artist as a young man, held at the Barbican Art Gallery in 1992, provided comprehensive insight into the three-and-a-half years Van Gogh spent in London (1873-76) and introduced us to Van Gogh’s literary and artistic heroes during this important formative period. In his introductory essay, Martin Bailey outlines the familiar facts of Van Gogh’s chequered career as art dealer, teacher and lay preacher in England and recounts the tale of his unrequited love for his landlady’s daughter. What is most rewarding and interesting about Bailey’s study, however, is its revelation of the extent of Van Gogh’s exposure to British art during his stay and the lasting impact it would have on his own work. Bailey emphasises the interesting fact that it was only after Van Gogh left England and was living in The Hague that he began to fully absorb the art he had seen there, through the back and white illustrations in The Graphic and The Illustrated London News.


It was also during his stay in London that Van Gogh enriched his knowledge of English literature. One book that touched him deeply and that would remain an inspiration was George Eliot’s *Felix Holt: the radical*, the story of an idealistic young man with whom Van Gogh readily identified. Van Gogh also read Thomas Carlyle, Daniel Defoe and Charlotte Brontë, but his preferred English author was undoubtedly Charles Dickens, whose human dramas were brought to life by the many excellent illustrations in his novels by the English graphic artists Van Gogh admired. Bailey makes the compelling suggestion that Van Gogh’s two surrogate ‘portraits’ of empty chairs (his and Gauguin’s), painted in Arles in November 1888, were at least partly inspired by Luke Fildes’s engraving of Dickens’s empty chair on the day of his death, *The empty chair, Gad’s Hill, ninth of June 1870*.

An essay by Debora Silverman in the same catalogue examines the relevance of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s progress* to Van Gogh’s spiritual predicament of 1875-76. Van Gogh found in Bunyan’s book, first published in 1688, an affirmation of his own ‘religious mentality of work and popular evangelism’. Silverman goes on to demonstrate the legacy of this treatise in Van Gogh’s art. In a complex analogy, she connects Bunyan’s ‘visual piety’, or ‘eyes riveted to a single focus’, with the pilgrim’s steadfast purpose. This she equates with Van Gogh’s use of the perspective frame, explaining: ‘When Van Gogh turned from religion to art, he converted the theology of optical singularity into a visual practice, facilitated by a craft tool bearing a striking analogy to the perspective glass relied on by Bunyan’s pilgrims – his perspective frame.’ Silverman sees a relationship between the intentional awkwardness of Van Gogh’s *The potato eaters* (F 82 JH 764) and Bunyan’s ‘clumsy’ writing, demonstrating their shared belief in the redemptive qualities of humble subjects and the divine agency of awkward language.

*The copy turns original: Vincent van Gogh and a new approach to traditional art practice*, written by Cornelia Homburg and published in 1998, was the first extensive study of Van Gogh’s copies of other artists’ work. Homburg surveys the range of Van Gogh’s copies, but what interests her most is the painter’s struggle to ‘incorporate an old-fashioned principle like the copy into his attempts to be productive and acceptable as a modern artist’. She suggests that Van Gogh adopted a particularly post-impressionist approach to his copies, creating free and personal interpretations of the original works instead of exact replicas. Homburg analyses the different artists Van Gogh was drawn to and the reasons for their appeal to him. He was fascinated, for example, by Rembrandt’s ability to transform a straightforward real-life image into an expression of eternal and elevated truth, which Van Gogh described as the ‘je ne sais quoi’ of true genius. True genius was also often associated with Delacroix, who was frequently linked to Rembrandt by 19th-century critics. Van Gogh was drawn to Delacroix’s expressive colour and, in fact, began his Saint-Rémy campaign of copying by making a painting after a lithograph of Delacroix’s *Pietà*.

However, the artist at the summit of Van Gogh’s private pantheon was Millet, whom he regarded as the great painter of humanity. In the autumn of 1889 Van Gogh painted 20 canvas versions of images from two Millet series based on the cycles of country life, *The labours of the fields* and *The four times of the day*. Homburg notes that despite his great admiration for Millet, Van Gogh felt the need to ‘heighten’ the older artist’s sombre muted palette with a more glowing and expressive range of colours, which would make subjects more mystical, less earthbound. Homburg’s discussion ends with an examination of the several copies Van Gogh made after Gauguin’s *L’Arlesienne*, a poignant meditation, perhaps, on the lessons he had so recently learnt from his collaboration with his friend.


In 1998 Van Gogh/Millet, an exhibition devoted exclusively to Van Gogh and his hero, was held at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. In her catalogue essay, Marie-Pierre Salé sets the context for Van Gogh’s fervent admiration of the older painter. Although exceptional, she explains, it did conform to a widespread enthusiasm for the artist in the late 19th century. Salé reiterates Homburg’s assertion that the popular image of Millet the peasant-painter was largely the result of Sensier’s hagiographic biography. This book had a profound influence on Van Gogh. It was Sensier’s Millet that Van Gogh idolised and in whom he found confirmation of his own ideal of the simple, hard-working life. Louis van Tilborgh traces Van Gogh’s responses to his mentor throughout his career, from the peasant subjects he tackled in Nuenen to his copies after the Seasons and Hours series made in Saint-Rémy. Van Tilborgh believes Van Gogh emulated Millet because he found in him an affirmation of his ideals—a new idea of religions based on nature, a humanity appropriate for modern times and, above all, a model for his ambition to endow images of ordinary people with a sense of the sacred and eternal.

**Van Gogh in context**

Much of the writing on Van Gogh since 1990 has broadened the debate beyond biography and art historical sources to embrace wider historical, social and philosophical contexts in order to elucidate the meanings of his art. An important step forward in the study of Van Gogh’s symbolism was made by Tsukasa Ködera in 1996 in *Vincent Van Gogh: Christianity versus nature*. Certainly, Van Gogh and symbolism had been linked from the start. Ködera takes up the notion of persistent idées fixes beneath the naturalistic appearance of Van Gogh’s works expressed by Albert Aurier in his 1890 article, stating his aim ‘to show the significane of Van Gogh’s principal themes and motifs in the thematic structure of his entire oeuvre.’ To this end he compiles a chronological list of the artist’s principal motifs, showing their frequency in each period of Van Gogh’s career, as well as a summary of descriptions of these motifs in the letters, which he uses to support his analyses. Having marshalled this impressive body of facts, Ködera builds a number of elaborate, sometimes convoluted, analogies around the artist’s themes, with a particular focus on the two aspects that form the subtitle: Christianity and its substitution by a religion of nature and the expression of this new religion in Van Gogh’s art. The most original and cogent section of Ködera’s book is the chapter entitled ‘Japan as primitivist utopia: Van Gogh’s japoniste portraits.’ Most studies of Van Gogh’s japonisme, Ködera claims, have concentrated on his stylistic and iconographic borrowings from Japanese prints, but have failed to reveal the multi-layered significance of his infatuation with the country and its culture. Japan, Ködera argues, was linked in Van Gogh’s mind, among other things, with an ideal community of artists living and working harmoniously like a religious brotherhood. However, Van Gogh actually knew very little about the historical realities of Japan, and could thus use it as a blank screen on which to project his utopian dream: ‘Detached from their original cultural context, Japanese motifs were relatively neutral motifs open to free interpretations by Western artists, [...] totally free of biblical allusions or traditional Christian symbolic meanings. That is why Van Gogh could crystallize his artistic, communal and religious ideals around the nucleus of Japan.’

One of the most trenchant voices to propose a new approach to Van Gogh in recent years has been that of Griselda Pollock. Writing in 1980, she rejected notions of genius and individuality and announced her Marxist stance in a polemical style. Sweeping aside dominant ‘expressionist,’ ‘symbolic’ or ‘sentimentalist’ interpretations based on narrative and biographical modes of interpretative criticism, she proposed different ways of conducting art historical work on Van Gogh. Rather than offering the paintings to

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be consumed as articulations of a personality, they were to be viewed as ‘practices’ within historically determined and therefore class-constituted positions.32

These ideas have been refined and developed in Pollock’s more recent writings. Her essay ‘On not seeing Provence’33 views the artist within a variety of themes that can be said to characterise the late 19th century, such as the paradigmatic condition of tourism tied to the search for unsullied nature in an industrialising world, and the challenge of making a valid form of religious art in a secular era.34 Pollock’s text is devoted to Van Gogh’s withdrawal from the city in search of what he called ‘a purer nature of the countryside,’ an idealised terrain, untainted by modern civilisation. She locates his quest within the phenomenon of tourism and the 19th-century vogue for artists’ colonies, but views Van Gogh’s choices as ‘off-beam.’ In 1885 the impulse to escape led him to a remote spot in Drenthe, not the occasional artists’ colony at Zweeloo, only a few miles away; and in 1888 he chose Arles, a historic, agricultural, but also industrialising town, instead of a more conventional Eden. Pollock demonstrates how little interest Van Gogh took in the present day realities of Arles, falling back on the tourist clichés that had grown up around the place. Van Gogh was, she argues, a tourist with a difference: ‘He was a conservative Dutchman abroad as an artist, ideologically adrift in the challenging conditions of capitalist modernity.’35 Addressing the frequently covered subject of Van Gogh’s utopian dream of the south, Pollock traces its familiar roots (Monticelli, Daudet, Japan, etc.) but brings new layers of meaning to this familiar theme. One of the most original aspects of her discussion focuses on the way Van Gogh folded his northern heritage, particularly Dutch 17th-century art (mediated by writers like Thoré, Blanc and Fromentin), into the fiction he crafted of Provence.

For Pollock, Van Gogh’s work is born of an effort to combat the disappointments of modernity with a recuperative bourgeois nostalgia, and this also informed his desire to create modern religious paintings. His concept of religious art based in landscape (a reaction to the more overtly Christian works of Gauguin and Bernard) had its roots in the romantic ‘pathetic fallacy.’ Van Gogh’s manifesto surrogate religious landscape, Pollock writes, was the Starry night of 1889 (F 612 JH 1751), which she describes as a ‘tableau,’ an invented composition destined to signify or, in academic terminology, to express consolation in the face of anxiety and heartbreak – the loss of certainty and the securely remembered – created by modernity.36

In 1997 an original, wide-ranging and penetrating study by Carol M. Zemel appeared.37 Something of the scope of Zemel’s work is immediately apparent from her title: Van Gogh’s progress: utopia, modernity, and late 19th-century art. She explains the two concepts behind its genesis. The first, more straightforward one, refers to John Bunyan’s famous moral tale The pilgrim’s progress, one of Van Gogh’s favourite books in his youth. The other, a darker, more complex and cynical notion, springs from a reference by Walter Benjamin to Paul Klee as the angel of history. Benjamin notes that the angel faces the past and is blown back on to the pile of debris we call progress. This double-edged concept reflects a duality in Van Gogh’s nature, on the one hand a naive idealism and, on the other, a dark sense of tragic destiny.

Zemel, like Pollock, rejects art history’s traditional emphasis on biography and genius. Her Van Gogh is constructed in terms of a number of late 19th-century cultural and philosophical concepts, with a particular emphasis on the utopian elements in the artist’s work. She acknowledges her two principal predecessors in this context, Kódera and Pollock, but explains her own broader-based approach as an attempt to examine ‘Van Gogh’s career not as evidence of a singular vision, but as the sign of a utopian impulse that is critical of many aspects of modernity.'38


35 Pollock, op. cit (note 33), p. 112.

36 Ibid., p. 108.

and committed to improvement, progress and change.”38 Some of Zemel’s most interesting revisionist arguments, to be found in the last two chapters, serve to illustrate her aim. By puncturing the hagiography that has traditionally surrounded Van Gogh, Zemel opens the way for some fresh interpretations. She points out, for example, that the artist was well attuned to the appeal that rustic subjects such as the Nuenen weavers and peasants could hold for an urban clientele. Contrary to the received idea that Van Gogh was an isolated genius, indifferent to worldly concerns, Zemel locates him within the vigorous, capitalist art market of late 19th-century Paris, and explores his strategies for personal recognition and success. She shows how his utopian vision led him to pursue idealist notions of career management in the context of a burgeoning capitalist art market, for example through the schemes he devised for group exhibition in Montmartre or for an artists’ commune in Arles.

Particularly compelling is her reading of the 13 panoramic landscapes painted in Auvers in the weeks leading up to Van Gogh’s death. Here, she deviates completely from the traditional interpretation of these works as the final epic expressions of a soul in torment. For her the pictures should not be viewed as ‘forecasts of [a] personal tragedy’ or as culminating statements of a stormy career but as quite the opposite, an optimistic project fully in step with avant-garde art and republican programs to imagine and construct a utopian countryside.39 Their horizontal format leads Zemel to link them to the contemporary interest in decoration, as exemplified by the work of Puvis de Chavannes, Monet, Denis and others, claiming that Van Gogh “could put the principles of decoration to the service of utopian fantasy.”40

In 1999 the Van Gogh Museum mounted Theo van Gogh, 1857-1891: art dealer, collector and brother of Vincent.41 This important exhibition and its accompanying catalogue provided a wealth of information on an area hitherto neglected in Van Gogh studies. Vincent’s long-suffering brother Theo, who during his short life patiently filled the role not only of financial supporter but also of counselor and confidant, has now been rounded out. Since the letters from Vincent to Theo far outnumber Theo’s surviving replies, the latter has remained a shadowy and often silent figure in relation to his brother. Chris Stolwijk’s essay gives a detailed account of Theo’s brief and difficult life, which, he concludes, was “an ephemeral flower surrounded by thorns.”42 Richard Thomson’s discussion of the structure and functioning of the Paris art market in the 1880s and the ways Theo negotiated these provides a valuable context for the art to which Van Gogh was exposed and the commercial strategies he devised. Thomson concludes that although Theo was hard-working, good at drumming up trade and brought major impressionists to the gallery, he did little to support the young avant-garde, apart from his brother, Gauguin and, to a limited extent, Toulouse-Lautrec. But as Thomson points out, the 1880s was an awkward junction between impressionism as an established modern art and the emergence of a new and fragmentary avant-garde, trying to establish itself on the margins of the art world. It was only in the years after Theo’s death that new galleries committed to the avant-garde would emerge.

Van Gogh’s interaction with the artistic avant-garde during his two-year stay in Paris from March 1886 to February 1888 is the subject of Vincent van Gogh and the painters of the petit boulevard, the catalogue of an exhibition held in St Louis and Frankfurt in 2001.43 The term ‘petit boulevard,’ as the distinguished Van Gogh scholar Cornelia Homburg explains, was coined by Vincent himself in order to make a distinction between the younger generation of disparate avant-garde artists and the older established impressionists of the grand boulevard. In addition to Van Gogh, the exhibition embraced the work of nine other petit boulevard artists – Charles Angrand, Louis Anquetin, Emile Bernard, Paul Gauguin, Camille and Lucien Pissarro, Geroges Seurat, Paul Signac and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Although Van Gogh was unaware of this avant-garde and was hardly familiar even with impressionism when he arrived in Paris, he learned fast. The contacts he made shaped his identity as a modern artist, crystallised his approaches to style and subject matter and to strategies for marketing his work. Richard Thomson demonstrates how Van Gogh’s petit boulevard refers to a specific
geographical area as well as describing a particular cluster of artists, who shared 'an instinct towards simply drawn forms, a willingness to exaggerate chromatic and textural effects in their paintings, a desire to put their work before the public and, if possible, sell it.'  

Montmartre and the roads climbing up towards it to the north of the fashionable Grandes Boulevards was the terrain of the these artists, and its louche world of cabarets and nightclubs provided them with subjects attuned to the spirit of fin-de-siècle decadence. Elizabeth C. Childs explores Gauguin's and Van Gogh's escape from the urban in search of natural and artistic utopias, but concludes by showing the ultimate incompatibility of the ideals of artistic community and collaboration and an 'art world that was actually more responsive to the pervasive of mythic individualism.' John House invites us to join him as time-travellers to Paris in June 1889, the year of the Exposition Universelle. Our itinerary encompasses the broad spectrum of venues where contemporary art could be viewed - from the exhibition's official Décennale to a display of the petits boulevard artists at the Café Volpini, from upmarket galleries such as Durand-Ruel, Petit, and Boussod, Valadon to such fringe premises as the shop of the colour merchant Père Tamuy. His essay concentrates on landscape and the ways in which Van Gogh and his colleagues reacted against impressionism, enriching direct observation with new layers of poetic and metaphorical meaning. The lessons Van Gogh learned from his Parisian experience proved fundamental to the remaining two-and-a-half years of his life and career.

Van Gogh and Gauguin

Much of the most recent scholarship on Van Gogh has addressed his relationship with Paul Gauguin, undoubtedly one of the epic collaborations in the history of art. Although the brief, climactic period of about ten weeks when the artists lived and worked together in Arles in the autumn of 1888 is the focus of these studies, this has proved a particularly effective viewpoint from which to consider their careers as a whole, each artist providing a revealing context for the other.

Debora Silverman has contributed a rigorously researched and penetrating book entitled *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the search for sacred art,* published in 2000. Silverman states that her aim is 'to present a different view of Van Gogh and Gauguin, linking both men to the destiny and historical specificity of the 19th-century world in which they were embedded, rather than by claiming them retrospectively as initiators of a 20th-century modernism of expressionism and abstraction.' As her title suggests, Silverman approaches Van Gogh and Gauguin from the perspective of a particular challenge they both faced, which she defines as 'how to discover a new and modern form of sacred art to fill the void left by the religious systems that they were struggling to abandon but had nevertheless left indelible imprints in their consciousness.'

The crux of her argument is that the roots of the tensions and affinities that emerged in the artists' association are to be found in their divergent religious legacies and educational formations: Gauguin's at an Orléans seminary, where he was taught to distrust reality, and Van Gogh's in a Protestant theological tradition that sanctified the everyday stuff of the real world. In one of the most original sections of the book, Silverman supports these opposing philosophical positions with reference to the actual facture of the paintings. Gauguin, she explains, seeks to dematerialize the surface of the painting, to reduce its physical immediacy, thereby encouraging imaginary or dream states. Van Gogh, on the other hand, was deeply involved with craft. Labelling him a 'weaver-painter,' Silverman creates a striking analogy between Van Gogh's practice and that of the weavers whose labour he had so admired when he was living among them in Nuenen.

A biographical, and particularly a psychobiographical approach to Van Gogh has, as we have seen, been discredited by several art historians, who consider that it...
oversimplifies the subject and ignores the relevant historical material. In *Van Gogh and Gauguin: electric arguments and utopian dreams*, Bradley Collins presents us with a very different type of psychobiography, one in which historical context is used to create a far more convincing, complex and nuanced construction of the artist-hero than anything written in this vein before. By making both Gauguin and Van Gogh the subject of his work, Collins automatically creates a wider, yet at the same time focused context for looking at Van Gogh. Inevitably, the heart of his story is the intense, highly creative period of a little more than two months in Arles. He leads up to this climactic episode with a thorough and thoughtful analysis of the childhood and youth of both artists, interpreting the significant emotional occurrences of their early lives from a psychoanalytic, largely Freudian perspective. Collins pursues a number of visual comparisons to support his psychoanalytic approach. Particularly original is his radical investigation of several of the canvases Van Gogh and Gauguin painted while working together in Arles. Through these he comes to broader and more complex explanations for the collapse of the artists’ relationship, ranging from repressed homosexuality to Gauguin as ‘father, mother, first Vincent, revered Master, abbot of the studio of the south,’ the object of Vincent’s many transferred emotions. With this rich and subtle reading of the collaboration as a whole, Collins achieves his aim of unlocking Vincent and Gauguin from their timeless coupling as the Angel and Devil of post-impressionism – which will, as he hopes, ‘encourage a wider and more accurate view of a relationship that was not always turbulent and conflicted.’

In a recent exhibition devoted to the same theme, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the studio of the south*, held at The Art Institute of Chicago and the Van Gogh Museum in 2001-02, Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers presented us with a thoughtful selection of the works of the two artists, tracing their evolutions before their first encounter in 1887, the complex patterns of artistic interaction that took place in Arles, and the lingering impact in the art of both after the demise of their friendship. The wealth of detailed information brought together in their extensive text is brilliantly used to bring the artists’ characters to life with a vividness and depth never before achieved.

Druick and Zegers provide us with a compelling account of the artists’ early histories. While Van Gogh’s youth was rooted in tradition, country values and religious Puritanism, Gauguin’s was exotic, itinerant, worldly and Catholic. In recounting the artists’ young lives, the authors establish the ‘inheritance’ each would eventually bring to their collaboration and the ways each would work to create his own legend. Particularly fascinating is the examination of the two artists’ religious formation. Echoing Deborah Silverman’s theories (although her book had not yet appeared when Druick and Zegers were writing), they explore the fundamental divide between Van Gogh’s Dutch Protestantism and the idiosyncratic, Catholic tutelage Gauguin received under Dupanloup.

In the section entitled ‘The meeting’ the narrative reaches its climax. Despite the artists’ widely divergent lives up until this point, we are told of the areas of common ground on which the two men were able to build a friendship: their nostalgia for a mythic, pre-industrial past, their belief in the consoling power of art and their passion for the writer Pierre Loti, who had enriched Gauguin’s experience of Brittany and who would shape Van Gogh’s anticipation of the Midi. Once the artists are established in Arles, Druick and Zegers give us a particularly vivid account of the ‘studio of the south.’ Their description of life in the Yellow House and of the roles the two artists assumed is an example of the brilliant historical reconstruction and psychological insight that characterise this study as a whole. It brings home with alarming veracity the day-to-day tensions these two egocentric and volatile personalities endured, cohabiting in a claustrophobic, disorderly space.

The authors also take us on a detailed, day-to-day itinerary of Van Gogh’s and Gauguin’s painting campaigns in and around Arles. They explore the differences in the two artists approach through a series of revealing comparisons of which one of the most notable is the two views of the ancient cemetery Les Alyscamps that they painted simultaneously on or around 25 October. The conceptual, topographical and stylistic differences of the finished works immediately mark out the fundamental divergence between the two artists. Apart from the familiar and much written-about conflict that arose from Gauguin working from memory and Van Gogh from nature, the authors ex-
plore much richer ‘personal frameworks through which the two artists interpreted the south.’

Much of Druick and Zegers’s most revelatory discussion addresses the aftermath of the Yellow House adventure. Back in Paris, Gauguin found that in his ‘interaction with Symbolist circles, Vincent acted as a kind of silent partner, just as Gauguin occupied Vincent’s thoughts in Provence; both men referred to the recent past in their art and continued to derive energy from the dialogue that played out directly in correspondence and indirectly through Theo.’

Vincent continued to resonate in Gauguin’s own project for a ‘studio of the tropics.’ In the 15 years after Van Gogh’s death, Gauguin found himself still in competition with his old friend’s growing posthumous reputation. Despite his ‘efforts to write Vincent out of his history,’ he found that ‘in death [he] became more of a force to be reckoned with than in life, as the period 1890–1903 witnessed the construction of an enduring, heroic image of genius around the Dutch artist, a narrative in which Gauguin, like it or not, was implicated.’

The Van Gogh that Druick and Zegers construct is a product of picture making, biography, psychological insight and a wide range of artistic and intellectual influences. In contrast to the fragmentary views of the artist that have emerged from the various particularised studies written over the last decade, they have given us back Van Gogh whole.

Van Gogh’s critical profile has varied considerably over the years. In the period immediately following his death and for much of the 20th century, it was Van Gogh the heroic artiste maudit, the mad genius, the great expressionist painter that predominated. Since 1990, more methodical art historical approaches have provided us with detailed knowledge of Van Gogh’s techniques and the dating of his works. Ongoing research promises a far more subtle understanding of the letters than has been available before. Contextual studies placing the painter in the context of late 19th-century society and politics gave us Van Gogh the modern artist-tourist in search of an unspoiled Eden, or the (albeit idealistic) operator in the burgeoning capitalist art market. More recent studies had revived the biographic and psychoanalytic approach, restoring the notion of individuality that was sidelined in these more politically-oriented studies. The most recent account of Van Gogh, Vincent in Brixton, a play by Nicholas Wright currently performing on the London stage, once again resurrects the artist-hero. In the end, it seems, Van Gogh the creative genius and misunderstood artist is irrepressible.


50 Ibid., p. 231

51 Douglas W. Drucik and Peter Kort Zegers, exhib. cat. Van Gogh and Gauguin: the studio of the south, Chicago (The Art Institute) & Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) 2001–02

52 Ibid., p. 173

53 Ibid., p. 275.

54 Ibid., p. 333
Vincent van Gogh, *Parc Voyer d’Argenson at Asnières (F 314 JH 1258)*, 1887. Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
In the spring of 2001 the Editorial Board of the Van Gogh Museum Journal began thinking of ways our publication could contribute to the celebration of Vincent van Gogh's 150th birthday in 2003. Inspired by the groundbreaking 12 views of Manet's Bar (Princeton 1996) we decided to ask several leading scholars of 19th-century art to provide us with their views of Van Gogh's Parisian masterpiece, Parc Voyer d'Argenson at Asnières, now in the Van Gogh Museum. We chose this picture because it is one many people might not immediately associate with Van Gogh, neither in terms of style nor subject matter, and we thereby hoped to encourage our contributors to think about his oeuvre anew. The results are presented in what follows, with Richard Thomson examining the work in terms of its decorative and emotional implications, Cornelia Homburg as a kind of avant-garde gambit, Richard Shiff viewing it through the writings of Clement Greenberg, and, finally, Linda Nochlin providing us with her own very personal interpretation. Naturally, every art historian has his or her particular take on any given work of art. A series of 'essays' (in the literal sense of the word) such as this is thus perhaps just as revealing of the writers themselves as it is of the painting under discussion.

Decoration and melancholy

Richard Thomson

The spring of 1887 must have been an exciting time for Van Gogh. Settled in Paris for a year, he now had real contact with artists who were working with experimental styles in their paintings. His own work was beginning to feel the benefit of this, as he essayed new possibilities. Van Gogh was particularly concerned with touch in the early months of the year, with different shapes and weights of mark. He also gave a good deal of thought to how touch acted with colour, both to give his paintings a surface vitality and to project an intense optical vibration. In addition, as the weather improved he began to find a subject. From the apartment he shared with his brother Theo in the rue Le Peletier he could easily walk within the hour beyond the fortifications that ringed the capital to the north-western suburbs. The peripheral communities of Asnières, Bois-Colombes and Levallois-Perret, dormitory zones on the ever-shifting frontier of the metropolis, were neither quite country nor city. That combination of proximity, ambiguity and flux had made the suburbs the crucible of recent experimental painting. At the eighth impressionist exhibition held in the spring of 1886, suburban subject matter had been at the core of the striking submissions of Signac and Seurat, whose large, radical A Sunday on the Grande Jatte (1884-86, The Art Institute of Chicago) was the manifesto painting of emergent neo-impressionism. It was within this nexus of possibilities, and with growing confidence, that Van Gogh painted Parc Voyer d'Argenson.

Although Van Gogh only knew Seurat though his paintings, making his acquaintance just before leaving for Arles in February 1888, he did have the benefit of Signac's friendship in early 1887. This was a double advantage. Signac could tutor Van Gogh in the colour theory and divi-
tion of tone central to neo-impressionism, while as a resident of Asnières he could familiarise the Dutchman with the suburban environment. *Parc Voyer d'Argenson* represents the candels of the chestnut saplings in blossom, and so probably dates from April. Although Signac may well have still been in contact with Van Gogh at this point – the former did not leave Paris for the Auvergne until 25 May¹ – the painting is far from being an `accredited' neo-impressionist work. Ambitious in scale, at over a metre across, and confident in its rather personal diversity of touch, the canvas is more than the result of Signac's tutelage, another essay in divisionism, or a scouting of the social habitat of Asnières. It harbours, and I believe substantially realises, other ambitions.

The overall tonality of the painting is quite grey. It is by no means as sharply focussed or coloured as the canvases Signac was producing in spring 1887. Van Gogh used a white ground to maximise luminosity, but made little concerted effort to keep his colours separate, as neo-impressionist doctrine insisted. Indeed, in the sky touches of blue and white, in places tinted with green, merge together to give the grey tonal effect neo-impressionism had been developed to avoid. Van Gogh did use the play of complementary colours, for example in the deep red of the candles and the Veronese or olive greens on the leaves of the chestnut trees. These effects are clustered in the central band of foliage that runs across the canvas and in the lower right corner. Otherwise the colours he employed adhere to local colour or opt for obviously pleasing harmonies, such as the pink and mid-blue clothing of the couple on the right. The seated couple to the left is more interesting chromatically; Van Gogh's use of russet red, grey and aubergine-violet in the woman's costume and blue and buttery yellow for the male figure presages the harmonies he would employ the following autumn in experimental still-life paintings such as *Red cabbages and onions* (F 374 JH 1538). Given that neo-impressionism was a system of painting intended to optimise luminosity, it is curious that *Parc Voyer d'Argenson* evinces little interest in the direction of the light. The left-hand couple cast a shadow, but elsewhere the fall of light is essentially ignored. This, it seems, is in the interests of the overall harmony. In the final analysis, the painting does not vibrate, as a neo-impressionist landscape does; rather it evokes a warm grey envelope.

So what did Van Gogh have in mind? The answer, in my view, is a decorative painting. Internal and circumstantial evidence points to such an interpretation. The painting's size gives it a substantial presence, and yet both the way it is painted and its subject are relatively unobtrusive. I have already described its subtle tonality, and this instinct to make the canvas work as a surface ensemble is enhanced by the touch which, although various, has a tapisry-like quality. The sky is worked in a diagonal stroke, more reminiscent of Angrand's current work than Signac's, while the foliage is quite textured, and the grass and paths more lightly dabbed. The lack of movement in the figures also contributes to a decorative tranquillity. In addition, *Parc Voyer d'Argenson*, for all the frontality of the figures (to which I will return) has an insistently banded quality, with areas of touch and colour spread horizontally across the canvas, accent by the verticals of trees and staffage. In September 1884, while at Neuen, Van Gogh had planned decorations for the Eindhoven dining room of Antoon Hermans.² From what we know of this uncompleted project, his solution was a format that spread figures across a landscape organised and textured in horizontal bands (fig. 1). During his time in Paris decorative concerns preoccupied several of Van Gogh's colleagues. In 1886-7 Toulouse-Lautrec had painted four murals at an inn he visited at Villiers-sur-Mortin (Seine-et-Marne) and two grisaille panels for Aristide Bruant's cabaret Le Mirliton, on the boulevard de Clichy.³ Louis Anquetin was working on a large canvas entitled *Chez Bruant*, which although never

fig. 1
Vincent van Gogh, sketch in letter 456/374, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
completed probably had a decorative intention.\textsuperscript{3} Van Gogh himself was involved in decorating popular cafés and restaurants in Montmartre with paintings and Japanese prints, and in early 1887 painted a number of motifs — still-lives and a nude — in a decorative oval format.\textsuperscript{5}

But if decoration was the painting's purpose, how else did it function? Its horizontality and frontality is at odds with many of the other Paris landscapes Van Gogh was producing in 1887. Whether representations of the riverside at Asnières, the city's fortifications, or the boulevards at the foot of Montmartre, he tended to organise these on strong diagonals. The diagonal was a useful and suggestive pictorial device. Sharp and linear, it created a strong compositional spine that held in place a surface vividly animated by touch and colour. Representing a road, quayside or pavement edge, the diagonal served as a reminder of the man-made character of city and suburb, while its visual drive into the fictive picture space acted as a pictorial metaphor for the pace of the modern metropolis.\textsuperscript{6} None of this applies to Parc Voyer d'Argenson. It is constructed in a much gentler way, its verdant and floral forms full and soft. Instead of a stern diagonal, the painting's foreground sways along the undulations of the path. Just left of centre, one of these arabesques curves back, counterpointed by the verticals of three receding saplings. By these means the eye is drawn back to what appears to be a door, set in a wall covered by ivy or creeper. One is reminded that the site Van Gogh had chosen for this and two smaller paintings\textsuperscript{7} was where an elegant château had once stood, in the mid-18th century the residence of René de Voyer d'Argenson, brother of Madame de Pompadour. As Louis Barron's illustrated volume on \textit{Les environs de Paris} informed readers in 1886, the estate had been refurbished 80 years earlier by the banker Peixotto, but had since fallen into ruin.\textsuperscript{8} Whether Van Gogh knew of the park's elegant 18th-century pedigree we do not know, but the half-hidden door adds a note of mystery and the three couples in different postures of courtship a sense of romance that endow the painting with a scent of nostalgia for the rococo. Indeed, it has been pointed out that Van Gogh, who had read the Goncourt brothers' \textit{L'art au dix-huitième siècle} (1875), valued Watteau's \textit{fêtes galantes} and was, of course, a passionate admirer of their contemporary reincarnation in the work of Adolphe Monticelli.\textsuperscript{9} But although one can draw parallels between Van Gogh's painting and similar scenes by Monticelli in which elegantly dressed figures disport themselves in front of foliated backdrops (fig. 2), Parc Voyer d'Argenson should not be seen as a mere recasting of Monticelli, still less Watteau, in a style

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Adolph Monticelli, \textit{The greyhounds}, c. 1873-75, Toledo Museum of Art}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{1} Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, \textit{Vincent van Gogh. his Paris period, 1886-88}, Utrecht & The Hague 1976, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{2} Evert van Uitert et al., exhib. cat. \textit{Vincent van Gogh: paintings}, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh) 1990, no. 4.


\textsuperscript{5} Three novels (F 335 JH 1226); \textit{A basket with bulbs} (F 336 JH 1227); and \textit{Nude woman, reclining} (F 330 JH 1214).


\textsuperscript{7} Lane in a public garden at Asnières (F 275 JH 1278) and Lane in a public garden at Asnières (F 276 JH 1259).


\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Vincent van Gogh: paintings}, cit. (note 2), no. 22.
loosely derived from neo-impressionism. It is, rather, a painting of very personal expression.

Writing to Theo in 1888 Van Gogh referred to *Parc Foyer d'Argenson* as a ‘jardin avec amoureux’ [59/475], and in that sense it was a prototype for the canvases he would paint in Arles that made much of the association of gardens and lovers. But on its own terms, and specifically in the context of mid-1887, the painting might be read very differently. When Van Gogh chose, not infrequently, to paint figures into his diagonally composed Paris scenes, the design serves to give them a pace and purpose within the picture (fig. 3). By contrast, in *Parc Foyer d'Argenson* the figures stand back from us, almost as if they were on a stage. A similar effect was achieved in a slightly later painting, made in the summer of 1887 and apparently representing factories at Clichy (fig. 4). This is not merely another suburban landscape, albeit with a less picturesque motif. Again the painting is organised in horizontal bands. Once more there is a couple, this time strolling across the picture space. Above all, the painter distances himself from them. In both these paintings Van Gogh dispensed with his more usual and dynamic diagonal composition for a more theatrical design. In these the painter and spectator are dis-
connected from the scene represented, which becomes less a scene observed than a tableau contrived. This process of distancing, non-emphatic as it may be, carries with it a note of melancholy and alienation.

At the end of 1887 Van Gogh was confident enough to hang work in the corridors of the Théâtre Libre. Although an informal arrangement, it meant showing alongside Seurat and Signac. Van Gogh’s ambitious decorative hybrid of neo-impressionism, was the canvas he chose to display. On leaving Paris for Arles in February 1888, his last act as a Parisian painter was, finally, to visit Seurat in his studio. There he would have seen, ready for show at the forthcoming Salon des Indépendants, the neo-impressionist leader’s haunting Parade du cirque (fig. 5). Although a nocturne and an entirely different subject, one wonders whether Seurat’s painting, which also evinces in the spectator a sense of glum disjunction from the vitality of the city, would have provoked in Van Gogh a sense of distant cousinage with his Parc Voyer d’Argenson. For what makes Van Gogh’s painting so fascinating a work is the way its delightful decorativeness is infused with melancholy.

A neo-impressionist experiment
Cornelia Homburg

In 1887 Vincent van Gogh painted a number of canvases that illustrate his investigation of neo-impressionism. Introduced by Georges Seurat at the Salon des Indépendants in 1886, named by the radical critic Félix Fénéon and effectively promoted by Seurat’s friend and collaborator Paul Signac, neo-impressionism quickly became established as an influential avant-garde movement. Anyone who was interested in new art in Paris took notice, and artists either participated or took pains to distance themselves from it.

A newcomer to the Parisian art scene who had arrived with a rather limited understanding of contemporary developments, Vincent van Gogh soon recognised the necessity of aligning himself with the avant-garde if he wanted to be considered a modern artist. He began by appropriating stylistic elements of impressionism, lightening his palette and adopting a more spontaneous brushstroke. Impressionism was probably the best starting point for someone who wanted to learn about contemporary art. Many impressionists were exhibiting regularly and their work could be studied at numerous venues. They were well established as modern artists and had generally earned the respect of their younger colleagues. An aspiring painter could benefit from their achievements, but he could not enter their ranks without being considered a mere follower. If one wanted to be seen as a member of the avant-garde, it was necessary to produce something more original. Van Gogh quickly became aware of this dilemma, and neo-impressionism definitely presented a solution. The style offered a new form of expression with regard to colour, brushstroke and content. Van Gogh joined many others in pursuing this opportunity.

Like many of his contemporaries, Van Gogh did not care to immerse himself in the more theoretical aspects of neo-impressionism. While early on he had been fascinated by Delacroix’s colour theory and had read Charles Blanc’s Les artistes de mon temps (1876), as well as Silvestre’s

Eugène Delacroix: documents nouveaux (1864), Van Gogh does not seem to have known the writings of Charles Henry, which were so important for Seurat. It seems that the practical implications of the style were sufficient for him and he applied them as they suited him best.

Van Gogh gained access to neo-impressionist ideas through his acquaintanceship with Paul Signac, whom he met in early 1888. The two artists went painting together in the suburbs of Paris, and Signac, always eager to promote the new credo, would have been an effective teacher. However, Van Gogh never followed Signac fully in terms of technique and never imitated his carefully orchestrated application of small dots. He undoubtedly found the pointillist brushstroke difficult: his more spontaneous, quick manner of working would have made the painstaking application of tiny, regular touches of paint extremely trying. As a consequence there are only a few canvases that show a truly explicit neo-impressionist approach. In the final analysis, however, the impact of the style’s basic characteristics on Van Gogh’s thinking cannot be underestimated. When the artist began to develop his own ideas about modern art, colour contrast and the deliberate use of brushstroke to intensify a motif from nature became important elements in his painting. Frequent references to Seurat during Van Gogh’s stay in Arles are testimony to his influence.

Van Gogh’s efforts at applying the neo-impressionist touch and intense colour contrast to his own work are perhaps best demonstrated by the highly finished Fritillaries in a copper vase (fig. 6), painted in the spring of 1887. Part of Van Gogh’s extensive Paris series of flower still lifes, this painting, with its dramatic orange blossoms against an intensely blue background, well illustrates his exploration of colour contrast and pointillist brushstroke. The Interior of a restaurant (fig. 7) is another attempt by the artist to create a neo-impressionist composition. In this canvas, the green and red complementary colour contrast is the dominant element, but the brushwork already shows the faster, elongated touch Van Gogh would soon begin to use in place of the pointillé advocated by Seurat and Signac. The impatience expressed in the brushwork is underlined by the artist’s decision not to use a small stroke throughout, but instead to execute certain elements—such as the legs of the table and the chairs—in a more traditional manner. By contrast, in his painting A suburb of Paris with a man carrying a spade (F 361 JH 1260), the artist focused more on pointillist paint application than on creating an intense colour contrast.

Van Gogh’s most ambitious canvas in the context of his experimentation with neo-impressionism is his Parc Voyer d’Argenson, also executed in the spring of 1887. This work shows that by now Van Gogh had fully assimilated some of neo-impressionism’s most important characteristics and was able to incorporate them into his own work effectively. It is also one of the largest works painted in Paris and deserves a prominent place among the canvases of that period. It depicts a park in Asnières, the Parisian suburb where Van Gogh often went painting with Signac or Emile Bernard. He captured the flowering trees of spring and the strolling couples who could frequently be found there. However, the carefully arranged arabesques of the paths, the distribution of tree trunks, and in particular the placement of the three pairs of people—walking, seated and stretched out on the grass—suggest a more deliberately composed layout than could be found in nature. This care-
ful arrangement of a landscape is much more typical of compositions by Signac and Seurat. Seurat’s compositional approach in *Sunday on the Grande Jatte (1884)* (fig. 8) offers an obvious comparison, even though Van Gogh’s canvas is of a more modest scale. Van Gogh here created a painting that distinguishes itself clearly from the more spontaneous, impressionistic park scenes that he had done earlier, emphasising instead the organisation and intentional composition characteristic of neo-impressionist canvases. The fact that there are studies for this final composition testifies to this aim. Even though Van Gogh used an elongated brushstroke that allowed for an easier and faster application of paint, the technique also gives the composition a rhythm and directional energy that seems as deliberate as the placement of compositional elements.

Van Gogh’s choice of a park scene was in a way an obvious one: the urban parks in and around Paris offered a convenient motif, one used by many of his contemporaries. It is also a reference to Seurat’s depiction of people relaxing along the banks of the Seine. At the same time, the subject attained extraordinary significance for Van Gogh during the course of his career, culminating in the paintings of *The poet’s garden in Arles*, which he made as decorations for the Yellow House. The people in *Parc Voyer d’Argenson* are not depicted as individuals, but as couples, or as Van Gogh called them: lovers. They seem to symbolise Van Gogh’s yearning for a partner in his personal life, although they can also be read on a broader level as an expression of his desire for human relationships in general, such as the friendships he hoped to establish with other colleagues, the exchange of ideas and the sharing of artistic ambitions. In Van Gogh’s identification of the composition with an emotionally charged content lies a fundamental...

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12 See, for example, letters 605/481, 623/500 and 687/539.

13 The similarities have often been pointed out; see, for example, Evert van Uitert, *Vincent van Gogh in creative competition: four essays from Simiolus*, Zutphen 1983, p. 38.

14 See, for example, F 223 JH 1111 or F 299 JH 1254.

15 F 275 JH 1278, F 276 JH 1259.
Derangement of clouds

Richard Shiff

During the war years of the early 1940s, a half-century after Vincent van Gogh’s death, critics continued to debate the aesthetic merit of his art. Was it absolute, to be appreciated under all conditions? Or did people suffering social disorder identify with Van Gogh’s jarring style because they recognised a parallel disorder and pain? The American Clement Greenberg related Van Gogh to two older contemporaries, Paul Cézanne and Henri ‘Le Douanier’ Rousseau, each of whom he considered comparably alienated and even ‘deranged.’ According to Greenberg, the public appreciated the look of these artists’ paintings despite – or rather because of – an expressive directness that verged on primitiveness. This was not necessarily an association the artists had encouraged, yet all three shared with primitivistic practices a technique that revealed every feature of its organisation. Reporting on the Van Gogh exhibition at the Wildenstein Gallery in New York in 1943, Greenberg had invoked ‘the emphatic physical presence of the [primitive] work of art that exposes to full view [...] its means of effectuation.’ He added immediately: ‘With Van Gogh there also enters the power of an original genius, over which he might exercise more control than over his hyperactive brush.’ Instead, Greenberg argued that the painter’s frustrated temperament, not some technical insufficiency, had put his control at risk: ‘Van Gogh became too obsessed by the pattern glimpsed in nature. The frenzied insistence with which he tried to reproduce this pattern in his separate brush strokes and give it the same emphasis over every tiny bit of canvas resulted in pieces of violent decoration, the surfaces of which had been ornamented instead of painted into a picture.’ It was typical of Greenberg to hinge his analysis on a technical observation: ‘separate brush strokes [...] same emphasis.’
At issue was the marking, caught between the constraints of naturalism and the ornamental excesses of 

Perhaps the Landscape in the rain of 1890 (fig. 9) presents Van Gogh’s emotionalised marking at its most extreme. Yet his rendering is also quite literal: in our own naive and primitive experience, we perceive falling drops of rain as linear traces just as the painter represented them, distributed with ‘the same emphasis’ throughout. Van Gogh’s attempt at ‘rain’ may have been inspired by Japanese prints and a sense of a Japanese ideal of nature; but his actual rendering, an instance of his ‘frenzied insistence,’ might also suggest alienation (as it did to many commentators). ‘Van Gogh’s shortcomings as an artist,’ Greenberg wrote, ‘are a translation into another language of those that belonged to him as a human being.’

Technique was the symptom, not the disease – the ‘mistakes [were] of temperament, not of craft.’

Given this distinction between temperament and craft, Van Gogh’s Paris paintings, such as Parc Voyer d’Argenson, acquire particular significance. For Greenberg, these works ‘unsettle[d] some of the usual notions’ by demonstrating Van Gogh’s capacity for self-control.22 ‘The artist functions best in the company of other artists,’ the critic would note. This was indeed the situation in Paris in 1887, where Van Gogh developed new techniques through absorbing the work of Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro, Georges Seurat, Paul Signac and others. In worldly Paris – a place of ‘logic, competition, and compromise’ – Van Gogh ‘most firmly controlled his feelings for the sake of pictorial ends.’

Expressive ‘feelings’ versus descriptive ‘pictorial ends’: the tension between these two elements appears in the performative organisation of Van Gogh’s mark of paint, which may have forever threatened to accede to his inflamed temperament. Greenberg implied, however, that the threat was diminished by the ‘Paris’ mark of Parc Voyer d’Argenson, characterised by its relatively regular stroke. Regularity can amount to ‘violent decoration’ but can also constitute a logical, compromising construction. Is the mark in Parc Voyer d’Argenson more constructive than either descriptive or expressive? The amorous human figures are surely cases of description: their features and accoutrements are indicated by strokes that trace aspects of the form, such as the curving brim of a hat or the rigid struts of a parasol.

But what of Van Gogh’s flowering trees and his sky? In these situations, his stroke was less specific and more repetitive, seemingly tempering his quick inventiveness with discipline. In the trees, reddish marks indicate blossoms, but without much textured differentiation from the green foliage. The patterning of marks gives the sense of

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20 Ibid., p. 162.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

flowering without necessarily indicating where a particular flower actually existed or how many one might have been able to count. This generalised effect is typical of the impressionism of the 1880s. It indicates that Van Gogh was interpreting, assimilating and controlling techniques that others had only recently developed.

And the sky? There, vigorous but repetitive strokes slant more or less in the same direction. Their internal distinctions are of colour, ranging from blue to greyish blue to white. Are there any clouds? Certain areas are predominantly bluish; others are quite greyish, a conventional colouring for clouds set against a blue sky. Despite this cloud-colour, the patterning of strokes, the rhythmic movement of Van Gogh’s hand, generates no cloud-shape. It is as if Van Gogh took the shape that pictorial convention might have assigned to clouds and dispersed it like a vapour throughout his constructed sky, signifying the missing form by a distribution of colour but not by the precision of line. If his putative clouds lose all shape and lack any obvious ‘pictorial end’ (Greenberg’s term), a different feature of their experience emerges – their atmospheric flux. Having no boundaries, the cloud-colour appears to shift within the pictorial sky, which it simultaneously constitutes.

Ironically, this degree of formlessness, unusual in pictures, is common in the clouds of nature, ever changing. A curious gap thus opens between Parc Voyer d’Argenson and Van Gogh’s many works that display delineated clouds, such as Olive trees in a mountain landscape of 1889 (fig. 10), painted at Saint-Rémy. Greenberg regarded the linear type of rendering as less constrained, more emotional, less of a compromise with Parisian impressionism and neo-impressionism. Yet the Paris style presents its own interpretive strangeness.

Van Gogh’s Parisian clouds acquire no secure physicality, whereas the mark that renders them is intensely physical, becoming denser and whiter (therefore brighter) where it meets the trees. What might its insistent slant mean, if anything? Is it merely a direction of the brush comfortable for the artist? The materiality of the paint stroke and its slant cause me to think – naively, fantastically, primitively – of rain. Yet Van Gogh’s sky must be relatively clear; a woman is carrying a parasol, not an umbrella; and sunlight seems to illuminate her companion’s extended arm. This ‘rain,’ then, is a raining down of strokes, of gestures. Van Gogh’s gesture describes neither an object nor a condition; the sky is not precisely cloudy, not precisely sunny, and the ‘raining’ is not rain. Nor does the gesture construct a form. If we scan from one local area of sky to another, the view simply changes; the slanting strokes and the colour vary as if to provide the delight of variation. Van Gogh’s mark is too directional to be pointillist and better resembles the more casual brushwork of impressionism. It is nevertheless too emphatic to exist within the impressionist paradigm. After his scene has been viewed, Van Gogh’s mark remains active, evoking the force of his hand – both its skilled control and its extremes of ‘deranged’ feeling – in Paris as much as in Arles, Saint-Rémy, or Auvers.

![Fig. 10](Vincent van Gogh, Olive trees in a mountain landscape (F 712 JH 1740), 1889, New York, The Museum of Modern Art)
Love in a cold climate
Linda Nochlin

I think this is the saddest painting of love that I have ever seen. There is a little fence in the right foreground that sets the tone – cutting off, enclosing, circumscribing. Although it is a big picture – I once saw it but now know it only in reproduction – it doesn’t look big, but rather small and melancholy in its adamantly refusal of space, air, breathing room. Rather than reiterating the sensuous, pleasurable mood of Watteau’s Embarkation for Cythera or the dulcet tone of his Fêtes galantes, Van Gogh lays before us a garden of repression, a park of frustration.

Are these indeed meant as lovers at different stages of their affair, on the model of Watteau? Are they in fact moving from separation (in the rear) to arm-in-arm strolling (in the right centre) to ‘fulfilment’ (centre left)? Perhaps that was what Van Gogh intended, but, as is so often the case with him, his intentions and the actual outcome of the piece diverge markedly. Confronting his park at Asnières, I think less of Watteau or Monticelli, who did similar scenes – or even of the (formally) more opposite Seurat and his Grande Jatte (fig. 8; also a scene of urban recreation in the out-of-doors) – than I do of Cézanne and his sinister Picnic (c. 1870–71, private collection) with its disturbing overtones of estrangement, alienation and perversion.

What a depressing painting this is, despite its peppy semi-divisionist brushwork and rather bright colour scale! The weaving paths, though they may give the painting a formal veneer of liveliness, lead nowhere: they are part of a circular argument, as it were. Van Gogh entraps each couple in its particular vacuum of stifled feeling. They are almost faceless. The back couple stare at each other, from a distance, separated by trees. The couple with linked arms march stiffly, as though under duress, given marching orders or going to a funeral. The left-hand couple pose awkwardly, frozen in place as though told to ‘hold it’ by a photographer.

Nowhere in this painting does the vital sap of Eros, so brilliantly conjured up by artists from Titian to Renoir to Picasso, flow freely. There are no physical connections made here, certainly no psychic ones. Come to think of it, the idea of Van Gogh as a garden-of-love painter is a bit ridiculous. If he is capable of generating an image of love in pictorial form it is not Eros that is in question, but some form of caritas, of universal charity. Think of his studies of the heads of peasant women for The potato eaters, or his nude drawing of Sien, or later, his apparently affectionate painting of Madame Roulin as La berceuse. These are, in a sense, loving images, but not images of love in action such as he sought, and notably failed, to create in his Parc l’Ayer d’Argenson. One wonders what drew him to such a subject, so superbly inappropriate to his talents. Of course, artists are continually drawn to utopian subjects, so there is no point in speculating in Van Gogh’s particular case. But it is the disparity between result and intention that is so striking here, and so disturbing.
En tant que quant à moi je me suis abstenu immédiatement de faire des tableaux, et j’ai continué une série de dessins à la plume dont je ne les deux premiers mais en plus petit format.
‘En tant que quant à moi’:

Vincent van Gogh and the French language

Wouter van der Veen

On 24 March 1888 Vincent van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo: ‘Je te renvoie ci-inclus la lettre de Tersteeg et celle de Russell – il sera peut-être intéressant de garder la correspondance des artistes’ [591/471]. A few years previously he had avidly read Sensier’s biography of Millet, and he knew Silvestre’s work on Delacroix.1 These books share a common feature, being both built around extracts from the two painters’ letters. This allows us to suppose that at the moment when he advised his brother to preserve Russell’s missive, Van Gogh was well aware of the value an artist’s correspondence might have. His advice did not fall on deaf ears: Theo preserved dozens of letters from Signac, Gauguin, Rodin, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec and many others, as well as more than 600 written by his brother.

Van Gogh’s correspondence has often been classed as a document humain, an opening on to the private life of an individual whose fame is public. And if the prefaces to the numerous editions of the letters2 unfailingly point out the artistic character of these epistles, none ventures to state that their nature is equally so. In general these analyses tend to place the documentary interest at the forefront, and with good reason: Van Gogh’s letters are crammed with descriptions of pictures, orders for paints and diverse artistic pronouncements. Such pieces of information are infinitely precious to the art historian. The form which these data take has passed into the background, however, and relatively little attention has been paid to the language in which the letters are written. The rare commentators on Van Gogh’s prose have confined themselves to one or two lines, most often to emphasise that this language is disordered, hurried, slapdash, jarring, imperfect ... Above all when Van Gogh wrote in French, as he did during the last two years of his life, when he produced more than 300 letters. Louis Roëlandt, who translated the Dutch letters into French, did not hesitate to claim that his style ‘fait parfois pitîte’.3 Gauguin, for his part, commented ironically: ‘He even forgot how to write Dutch and, as we have seen from the publication of his letters to his brother, he only ever wrote in French and in admirable French at that, with endless numbers of “tant que quant à.”’4

However, other voices point to what has been called ‘an indefinable attraction all [its] own’,5 a disconcerting, fascinating style, to which only the painter Emile Bernard devotes more than one page, from which the following is an extract: What does it matter then if his style is not correct, it is alive, and our understanding is capable of paying it delicate attention, as when we sometimes have a feeling for superior beings who cannot speak a word of our language. ‘Is it not the intensity of thought which we seek, rather than the callowness of touch,’ he wrote to me, [...] I have applied to his letters the words he wrote on the subject of his painting, apparently apologising in advance for:

4. ‘Il oubliait même d’écrire le holländis et comme on a pu voir par la publication de ses lettres à son frère, il n’écrivait jamais qu’en françâis et cela admirablement avec des “tant que quant” à n’en plus finir’; see Paul Gauguin, Avant et après, Paris 1923, p. 15
the sloppiness and slightly mad enthusiasm. It is the thought that must be sensed in them, it is the true life that must be found. The calmness of touch is not there, it is true; but what intensity! And what joy they will give us after so many stylistic exercises written by people who have nothing to say. [...] Ardour has no need of syntax or of sentences when it attains the moral intoxication of meditation and creation.6

In 1984 Artemis Karagheusian published an inventory of transcription errors made in the principal editions of the correspondence,7 collating these with the facsimile edition of the manuscripts preserved in the Van Gogh Museum. In the introduction to this compilation she indicates several idiosyncratic elements that can be said to form the embryo of a general characterisation of Van Gogh’s language as it appears in his letters. Karagheusian’s comments are in line with those of his predecessors, and she describes Van Gogh’s language as a vast jumble with neither head nor tail. It is nothing of the sort. Analysis of Van Gogh’s usage of the French language reveals great regularity and great care in expression.

The idiosyncrasies presented below are linguistic peculiarities whose frequent occurrence justifies their classification as ‘characteristic.’ Their analysis is based on an exhaustive inventory of all such elements found in the manuscripts. The errors of language are the most easily discernible, which explains the large number of them among the examples given.

The results are presented in three parts, devoted consecutively to syntax, semantics and spelling, and style. This study aims to shed light on a number of shadowy areas in Van Gogh’s writings, and may serve as a summary of his use of French.8 It will also, one hopes, make it easier to read and understand his letters. One final goal is to draw attention to the artistic nature of a great number of passages and elements in Van Gogh’s correspondence.

Syntax

If one was to read just one of Van Gogh’s letters, chosen at random from his correspondence, it would surely give the impression that the painter cared little for French grammar: negligence and indolence alone seem to guide his writing. The punctuation appears to confirm this impression: the use of commas, full stops and capital letters is very irregular; and question marks, colons and semi-colons are almost entirely absent. Moreover, grave and acute accents and circumflexes, diaereses, hyphens, apostrophes and cedillas are omitted in a large number of cases, or appear where they should not.

One curious phenomenon, however, contradicts Van Gogh’s supposed carelessness: the over-use of the subjunctive. The subjunctive is often neglected by allophones on account of its difficulty. Today, even the French themselves are increasingly abandoning it in everyday language. So why would a foreigner, who presumably cared little for the grammatical rules of French, so abuse it?

Equally intriguing are the many affected turns of phrase Van Gogh uses. This complicates his expression with forms that his level of language did not allow him to use without making serious errors, and give his language the thoughtless appearance remarked upon by the various authors mentioned above. However, Van Gogh practised and made progress; the instances in which he resorted to complex uses of language were in effect challenges to his own knowledge and mastery of French, and the later correspondence shows that his efforts eventually paid off. His language becomes more fluent and his style firms up.

At a syntactical level, conjugation, the use of adverbs and the grammatical constructions encountered in Van Gogh’s letters have particular features, from which idiosyncratic constants can, to a certain degree, be isolated.

Conjugation

In most cases, Van Gogh respects the rules of conjugation. The mistakes he makes are almost always imperceptible in speech; nowhere do we find nous partez, for example. On the other hand, it is not rare to encounter, as in 58455,10 ‘fais comme tu sembleras.’11 This mistake is not so much the fruit of too little as of too much care; the s that wrongly ends sembleras relates to the personal pronoun te which precedes it, and which undoubtedly inspired the use of the marker of the second person singular. By the same logic, agreement of the subject with the past participle conjugated with the auxiliary avoir is wrongly used in cases like 574128: ‘Elle a maintenue,’ or 57366: ‘à moins qu’elle ait eue.’ However, the following example demonstrates that Van Gogh also knew how to allocate past participles correctly: 85198: ‘La tête feline très bronzée coiffé
d'un bonnet garance je l'ai plaquée contre une porte peinte en vert et les briques orangées d'un mur.

All in all, Van Gogh understands conjugation, but he applies its rules imperfectly. Hence, when employing the imperative mode, he often uses the marker of the second person singular, as in 61:219: "cherches un peu?; or more often, when the recipient is addressed as "tu," a vou-"

... 6 Karagheusian, op. cit. (note 5)

7 Kataghessian, op. cit. (note 5)


9 The first letters written by Van Gogh in the French language, penned in Belgium in 1880 and 1881, seem to be a case in point. Indeed, the remarks below apply to them. 801:21: `cela apprend à voir et alors surtout et seulement même quand on voit cela longtemps.' Devoid of punctuation, this passage fails to take account of the fact that même refers to what precedes it, and not to what follows. This is even more problematic, as in the absence of punctuation certain adverbs can be interpreted in two ways: as an interjection or as an adverb proper. Hence, in the case of 57:3:72: `j'espère que le père Tan guy est sage assez,' what are we to make of the assez? Fortunately, context and good sense tell us that we should read assez sage. But in 57:8:3:57: `Il m'arrive de me sentir déjà vieux et brisé et pourtant encore'

10 Each example given here is preceded by a letter number, following the new numbering used in De brieven, cit. (note 2); for a concordance of the new and old letter numbers, see p. 77. The second number indicates the line where the quotation begins on the manuscript. The great majority of the manuscripts are reproduced in facsimile edition of the letters (Lettres de Vincent van Gogh, cit. [note 8]).

11 As far as possible, the particular features commented on are here indicated in bold type.
amoureux assez pour ne pas être enthousiaste pour la peinture,' it is difficult to say whether or not we should interrupt the sentence after amoureux, something that could have been avoided if Van Gogh had transposed amoureux and assez. From time to time as well adjectives wrongly take on the function of the adverb. This misuse is frequent with probable, used for probablement, as in 604:58: ‘c’est un mal que j’ai attrapé là-bas probable en grande partie par le mauvais vin dont j’ai trop bu.’

Seven other adverbs, however, far from disrupting the intended meaning, serve it admirably. Apart from proving the consistency of the writing, they help support the painter’s style: hardiment, absolument, terriblement, rigoureusement, carrément and gravement. Returning again and again without ever becoming redundant, these adverbs exaggerate the scope of the utterance and allow the repeated reinforcement of the line of argument, inflating the style with an adroitly measured unconditionality. Bis repetita pia sent.

Sentence construction
Van Gogh’s sentences obey few rules of construction. Hence prepositions do not always agree with the verb. The examples of 757:66: ‘J’ose espérer de faire plus amplement connaissance’ and 740:132: ‘au contraire on y tenait de lui sauvegarder l’existence’ show that ignorance of a prepositional construction is sometimes sufficient to brand the entire wording incorrect. In matters of construction, as elsewhere, fearlessness was the law of the land, and far from carefully going around the obstacle, Van Gogh charges it and overcomes it in his own way. He ruthlessly subordinates syntactical form to the idea to be expressed, or rather: without neglecting it, does not allow it to dominate the message.

Thus the painter occasionally has recourse to a singular kind of construction, in order, it seems, to methodically put forward his argument. Such constructions are found several times in the correspondence. The example reproduced below (652:25) takes account of Van Gogh’s punctuation and the way the words are set out on the page:

‘Si un peintre se ruine le caractère en travaillant dur à la peinture qui le rend stérile pour bien des choses pour la vie de famille etc etc. Si conséquemment il peint non seulement avec de la couleur mais avec de l’abnégation et du renoncement à soi et le cœur brisé Ton travail à toi non seulement ne t’est pas payé non plus mais te coûte exactement comme à un peintre cet effacement de la personnalité moitié volontaire moitié fortuit.’

The sentence is spread out over three paragraphs, which sustain the argument and give it rhythm. Although grammatically incorrect, this form nevertheless has the advantage of isolating the arguments and consequently accentuating them.

Another disturbance of grammatical construction is an effect of the very nature of Van Gogh’s writing. Crossed and scratched out, sometimes completed with words or even whole passages, what was once a correct sentence construction must often submit to revision. The resulting palimpsest is not always graspable without stops, starts and re-reading. Such additions are frequently easily identifiable: the writing becomes more cramped, or curves or flattens out according to the space available on the sheet of paper. Many characters also bear an ink mark, betraying the earlier presence of a full stop. This practice of correction reveals one aspect of Van Gogh’s writing mechanism, and throws into relief the numerous transformations brought to the text in the course of editing. The construction inevitably suffers as a result, since the evolution of the ideas does not necessarily adapt to the sentence initiated, as the following passage illustrates: 764:52: ‘tant que l’automne sera propice je fais actuellement des études que je le prierais de venir voir.’

In light of these examples it must now be evident that Van Gogh was far from insensitive to French syntax. The cases of hypercorrection – plus the simple fact that the Dutch painter never avoided a difficulty – show that Van Gogh cared about grammatical correctness. However, the grammar remains entirely functional, always in the service
of the expression of ideas and impressions. It is clumsily used, but it is not entirely chaotic; Van Gogh moulds the syntax to his own needs, improvising rules where his lack of knowledge of the existing ones endangers the complete communication of what he is trying to say.

Semantics and spelling

The same tension that governs Van Gogh's syntax - i.e., between the desire for correctness and his relative ignorance of conventions - is also found at word level. The meaning of the words used sometimes seems impenetrable, and in places their spelling is eccentric. Faced with certain passages one wonders whether the author wrote his missives with such haste that he had no time to re-read them, or for taking care of any kind. And in certain cases this supposition is borne out by the text itself: 696:119: 'Excusez ma grande hâte j'ai même pas le temps de relire la lettre.' But haste does not explain everything. A brief glossary reveals that Van Gogh's sometimes-disconcerting Particular meanings

Reading the entire body of letters makes it possible to separate out the meaning of a certain number of recurrent terms whose use may lead to confusion. Some of these meanings are simply wrong; others are merely old-fashioned or rare. The list below is not exhaustive, but gives a few characteristic examples of Van Gogh's semantic idiosyncrasies.

- **noir**: 'dark,' 'obscure,' 'brown,' 'night.' 722:19: 'L'habi-llement noir noir du bleu de prusse tout cru'; 725:2: 'Exposition de toiles de moi dans son trou noir'; 728:84: 'Très intéressant que tu aies rencontré Chattian Est il blond ou noir'; 734:50: 'Que n'aurais je pas donné pour que tu eusses vu Arles lorsqu'il y fait beau maintenant tu l'as vu en noir';

- **raide**: 'sudden' or 'suddenly.' This adjective most often assumes an adverbial function. 603:107: 's'est pour changer raide que je suis préoccupé';

- **Venir**: designates the development and production phase of an image. Although common in engraving or photography, this expression does not lend itself to painting, for which Van Gogh, however, uses it. Zola employs it similarly throughout L'œuvre. 707:77: 'Cependant les tableaux viennent mieux si on les soigne';

- **Ereinter**: for Van Gogh, this verb signifies 'to tire' or 'to exhaust' in the majority of cases. Its use is correct, even if he sometimes employs it when a more moderate verb would have been more suitable: 877:4: 'je trouve que Théo Jo et le petit sont un peu sur les dents et éreintés.' It is also sometimes (wrongly) applied to objects, and then means 'to spoil' or even 'to destroy': 591:85: 'j'ai complètement éreinté cette étude en voulant la finir chez moi.'

- **Abstract** and derivatives: 'distracted.' When discussing art, Van Gogh uses abstract in the sense of the independence of a representation from the object represented. Thus, comparing his work to that of Gauguin and Bernard, he writes 825:28: 'Ce que j'ai fait est un peu dur et grossier réalisme à côté de leurs abstractions mais cela donnera pourtant la note agreste et sentira le terroir.' More often, however, he uses abstract or abstraction to designate a state of distraction, absent-mindedness or mental absence. This meaning is old-fashioned in French. 803:4: 'Je l'avais – dans un moment d'abstraction – bien caractérisée – adressée Rue de Laval au lieu de Rue Lepic.'

\[\text{Dutchisms}\]

Strange words, incorrect meanings or curious constructions are occasionally the result of the influence of Van Gogh's native language, Dutch. The list below groups together the main cases of contamination, the 'Dutchisms.' The correspondence contains numerous cases of probable Dutchisms, as in the case of *liefjeontre.* This adverbial lo-

12 Millet used éreinter in a similar fashion. In a letter written from Barbizon on 29 December 1862 we find: 'Je vous conseille fortement une chose : c'est d'épêcher d'éreinter cet endos.' quoted in Sensier, op. cit (note 1), p. 233.
In Van Gogh's writings Dutch comes to the aid of French when his French linguistic reserve is insufficient for a given situation. However, this influence is confined to isolated cases and is not systematic in nature.

**Spelling**

French has a complex system for noting down the sounds of which it is composed. Van Gogh's friend from Arles, the postman Roulin, had only an approximate grasp of it. He wrote to Vincent in reference to his daughter: 'elle a tous pour elle seulement a mon arrivais elle n’a pas voulu me voir il n’y a hu qu’a mon départ que ma bien regarder et ma un peu irais la barbe.' Van Gogh was a veritable man of letters in comparison to Roulin, who here improvises French phonetically. The postman spells the same sound [e], for example, in a number of different ways: é, éé, ées, ais, ait, aient, et, est, ez, er ... The possibilities are inexhaustible and abundantly exploited according to the random inspiration of the moment. Van Gogh is infinitely more regular, even to the point that a certain number of spelling mistakes became irreversibly fixed in his use of the language. Perhaps the best example is the word néanmoins, which he systematically writes as néanoins throughout the correspondence. Here again we find great consistency in an aspect of a language of whose rules, one is tempted to think on occasion, Van Gogh was ignorant. In fact, however, if one does not take into account errors linked to accents, apostrophes etc., Van Gogh's spelling is entirely respectable.

The main systematic spelling mistakes are as follows: d'avantage for davantage; aujourd'hui; parceque; peutetre; néanmoins; chôse; raconter; impressioniste; plutôt; à faire pour affaire; à compte pour acompte; déjeuner; aucunement; décemment; auquels; sonanbule. This series reveals several common features. The first source of error is the apostrophe, which Van Gogh uses only haphazardly. The same is true of his use of accents, which are omitted in around a third of all cases. The conjunctive phrase purr que and the adverb peut-être are always joined up, with the hyphens and spaces in set phrases suffering the same fate as the accents and apostrophes.

Such treatment, which also affects the cedillas, does not throw any special light on Van Gogh's writings. At the same time, it should be emphasised that these are general-
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By spelling mistakes without consequence for the meaning of the terms, with the exception of à faire and d'avantage.

One inevitable consequence of Van Gogh's neglect of accents, apostrophes, hyphens, spaces and cedillas is that every word that includes them is liable to find itself altered, and altered in an irregular and unforeseeable way. Thus, it is sometimes difficult to establish the difference between ou and où, a and à, la and là. However, in the great majority of cases, the context leaves no doubt whatsoever as to the letter-writer's intent.

The spelling deviations feature other constants. For example, Van Gogh has a tendency to add or take away a silent 's'. He does not hesitate to write, for example, in 580:26: 'il a fait semblants'; 609:73: 'Mauve a dans un seul moifait et vendu pour 600 francs d'aquarelles' and even 709:15: 'Quelle beisses!

Consonants are sometimes systematically doubled, as in rarecenter or vacances. Other consonants in words correctly spelt elsewhere are not free from unexpected doublings as well: 611:26: 'barraque'; 631:51: 'viollettes.' The opposite also occurs, but less frequently, as in 740:67: 'tourrie'; 740:8: 'anée.'

The painter's spelling is also marked by an archaïc usage of the adverb très. Van Gogh almost always places a hyphen between très and the syntagm with which it is associated: 733:11: 'l'ose compter retourner à la maison très-tranquillement.' The original character of the prefix très subsisted for a long time in French spelling: initially it was attached to the word, as in F. Estienne's Dictionarium latino-gallicum of 1552 (tresbon, treslong, etc.); later it was linked by a hyphen (tres-bon), which the printer Didot was the first to eliminate, followed by the Académie, in 1877. Van Gogh must have acquired the habit of including the hyphen under the influence of an old source, and his usage is persistent. For someone who readily omitted accents and hyphens, the consistency with which he writes très- [...] and choose is truly remarkable.

The final distinctive feature of Van Gogh's spelling relates to proper names. Here, his orthographic behaviour deviates significantly from the relative correctness he displays elsewhere. He writes, for example, Bock, Guillaumin, Mouries, Roulin, Perron,16 Brias, Montmajour, Marseilles, instead of Boeh, Guillaumin, Mourier, Roulin, Perron, Bruyas, Montmajour and Marseille. The spelling of these names varies from one letter to the next. Mourier and Montmajour, among others, have three or four different spellings, whereas the most characteristic feature of the painter's written aberrations is their consistent or partially systematic nature.

Like syntax, words, their meanings and spellings have a tendency to deviate from academic French. Dutch is sometimes at the root of these alterations, but most often its causes cannot be determined. In order to read the letters properly, it is important to steep oneself in the peculiarities noted above, so as not to interpret them according to the dictionary. To all appearances, it was not the dictionary that formed their basis but rather a determined, long and inevitably imperfect apprenticeship.

Style

The goal of this study is not to produce a literary commentary on Van Gogh's correspondence, but to show the peculiarities of his language. However, numerous passages bear witness to a desire to use fine language. Consequently, a discussion of the style in which the letters are written is inevitable.

In learning French Van Gogh mainly relied on literary sources and his style retains obvious traces of this. At the same time, it is marked by numerous recurrent expressions, correct or incorrect, which act as leitmotifs, bringing rhythm to his letters with varying degrees of success.

Another stylistic component is a certain clumsiness, born of his incomplete mastery of French. This is revealed, amongst other things, by breaks in register and astonishing

13 The hypothesis of the Dutch origin of Van Gogh's use of rester may be called into question by the fact that rester had the same meaning as habiter in regional, rural French in the 19th century. The following quotation, from Marcel Proust's La fugue (Paris 1980, p. 515 [note]) illustrates this usage: 'C'est ainsi que Françoise disait que quelqu'un restait dans ma rue pour dire qu'il y demeurait, et qu'on pouvait demeurer deux minutes pour rester, les fautes des gens du peuple consistant seulement très souvent à se confondre, comme a fait d'ailleurs la langue française – des termes qui au cours des siècles ont pris réciproquement la place l'un de l'autre.'

14 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, b 1071 V/1962


16 Peyron experiences an astonishing written evolution. This name is always correctly spelt, up to the moment when the painter is preparing to leave Saint-Rémy. Peyron then changes into Perron, which means 'railway station platform' in Dutch. This phenomenon is echoed in the transformation of the art critic Aurier's name into Lauer (baule) following the publication of his complimentary article on Van Gogh's work.
Idiosyncratic expressions and awkwardness in style

The following list reproduces the majority of the several idiosyncratic expressions encountered in the letters. The term expression does not exactly cover the matter at hand, however, as it is sometimes a question of a single word used in a curious way. All the same, in the cases given below, the words belong to a group of recurrent words, and consequently belong not to the category 'vocabulary' but rather have the status of 'idiosyncratic expressions.'

– Van Gogh’s favourite expression was, as the title of this essay suggests, ‘en tant que quant à.’ This expression is encountered frequently. Although clear in its meaning, its recurrent appearances have a tendency to impart a touch of the ridiculous to the wording, since it is often used to introduce a particular standpoint, as in 605:37: ‘En tant que quant à moi je me suis abstenu immédiatement de faire des tableaux’;
– lorsque - alors que. In letter 726:59, Van Gogh uses lorsque pour puisque, although up to that point he had employed this conjunction correctly. From this passage on, lorsque and alors que can mean puisque, but lorsque may also mean alors que and vice-versa. This makes certain passages extremely obscure: 796:2000: ‘je crois qu’alors rien ne témoignera plus que Brias lui-même alors qu’on se rend compte d’après ses achats de ce qu’il a cherché à être pour les artistes’;
– quand bien même que. The regular incongruous addition of que after quand bien même is a typical example of hyper-correction. The desire to use a rather affected expression is not lessened by his lack of knowledge of the mechanism that governs it, and Van Gogh ends up expressing himself in the language of the Bourgeois gentilhomme: 728:41: ‘Si nous pouvons tenir le siège un jour de victoire viendra pour nous quand bien même qu’on ne serait pas dans les gens desquels on parle.’ The problem is compounded when this expression is mixed with alors que: 778:205: ‘et d’en faire avec ce que j’ai appris en somme que de les délaisser alors que quand bien même il faudrait payer pour une pension’;
– de ce que. Van Gogh readily makes inappropriate use of this expression, as it enables him to get out of many grammatical impasses: 605:62: ‘les gens d’ici s’en font trop prévaloir pour me faire payer tout assez cher, de ce que je leur prends avec mes tableaux un peu plus de place’; 628:19: ‘Bon. Quelle peut donc être la raison de ce qu’il perd ses qualités.’ Sometimes de ce que replaces ce que: 712:2: ‘C’et alors que plaisant de ce que tu dis des deux nouveaux amis’;
– et ... et ... Van Gogh frequently uses a figure that allows him to accentuate the multiplicity of propositions, and which consists of introducing each one, including the first, by the coordinating conjunction et. This sometimes complicates the wording considerably: 575:14: ‘Cela ferait bien plaisir à la mère si ton mariage réussit et pour la santé et pour tes affaires il faudrait pourtant ne pas rester seul’; 605:88: ‘Mais au bout de cette année j’aurais gagné et mon établissement un peu bien et ma santé je suis porté à le croire.’

For a Dutchman, Van Gogh’s level of French is excellent, but it is not that of a native speaker. Moreover, the painter suffered from emotional crises that occasionally disturb his expression. Letter 712, for example, begins with an angry outburst, Theo having mentioned the frame of a picture by two Dutch painters Vincent has never heard of. The following passage, an extract from this letter, shows how much Van Gogh’s use of language was influenced by his state of mind: 712:4:8 ‘Et dans ces moments-là juste après le travail dur et plus qu’il est dur je me sens la caboche vide aussi allez.’

A certain number of cases of clumsiness, some of which are recurrent, are due to the contamination of one expression by another:

– the recurrent un tant soit peu près is a combination of un tant soit peu and à peu près;
– en tant que quant à moi results from the juxtaposition of en tant que and quant à moi;
– en autre que combines en outre and autre que;
– comme de neuf; comme nouvelles contaminates de neuf.
However, the origins of such instances of awkward expression are not always detectable. The following examples have been chosen from a series of around thirty letters.

- 707:199: "Écris moi le plus tot que cela te sera possible; dès could have advantageously replaced le plus tot;
- 728:7: "La raison de cela est que G. commence à surnommer son mal de foie; en would have been a correct alternative for de cela;
- 728:5: "Nous journées passent à travailler! Nous passons nos journées à travailler.
- 734:5: "J'espère que Gauguin te rassurera complètement aussi un peu pour les affaires de la peinture. Is it possible to reassure someone 'completely a little'? No doubt, here the lack of punctuation also plays a part: a comma placed after complètement would have resolved the problem of meaning.

The meaning of a passage can also be considerably obscured by awkwardness in the construction of the sentence:

- 701:26: "J'ai écrit à Gauguin en reponse à sa lettre que si il m'était permis à moi aussi d'agrandir ma personnalité dans un portrait j'avais en tant que cherchant à rendre dans mon portrait non seulement moi mais en general un impressioniste. J'avais conçu ce portrait comme celui d'un brave simple adorateur du Bouddha éternel. It is probable that en tant que cherchant should in this case be replaced by cherchant. However, the second sentence may also be part of the construction, and j'avais would then have been repeated incorrectly. The construction sought by Van Gogh would then have been: J'ai écrit à Gauguin en reponse à sa lettre que si il m'était permis à moi aussi d'agrandir ma personnalité dans un portrait, j'avais en tant que cherchant à rendre dans mon portrait non seulement moi mais en général un impressioniste - conçu ce portrait comme celui d'un brave simple adorateur du Bouddha éternel;
- 738:11: 'Je me ressens tout à fait normal.' Seeking to use the productive aspect of the prefix re by placing it before sentir to indicate that he once again feels normal, Van Gogh makes the mistake of reproducing an existing word that has an entirely different meaning. Here, he repeats an error he had made before, one that has caused a great deal of ink to flow; 64 27: 'Si tu m'envoies la prochaine lettre Dimanche matin il est probable que je réfléchis ce jour-là à Stes Maries pour y passer la semaine.' It is evident that Van Gogh does not use refléchir in its primary meaning; he intends to return to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer.

Language registers and oral character of the language

Van Gogh had several sources available to him in learning and then improving his French. Based on his correspondence, the most easily identifiable of these is literature. Under its influence Van Gogh sought to express himself in a sustained register. The perverse effect of this source, however, is that in places the wording takes on an affected, unnatural aspect.

Another source of learning was the spoken language he heard all around him. Spoken French has several registers, whose use is subject to certain rules of convention. Van Gogh mastered the current register the most easily, colouring it with literary phrases. His incursions into other registers, however, rarely do him credit:

- 658:15: 'Certes le mieux serait qu'il filât tout droit ici au lieu de s'y démeter peut-être s'en merdera-t-il en venant à Paris avant.' Here, in a letter written to Gauguin in the current register, in a sentence where the imperfect subjunctive is correctly employed, Van Gogh suddenly makes an incursion into a very familiar register, bordering on the vulgar. His usage is far from felicitous, giving rise to an obscure and grammatically incorrect sentence;
- 706:76: 'Mais est-ce que c'est excessivement vrai que le voyage à Arles soit si éreintant que vous dites. Va donc.' The sudden change to tutoiement, coupled with the use of an interjection that assumes a certain familiarity, creates a collision of registers that in this case considerably reinforces Van Gogh's intended effect;
- 727:81: 'Ainsi hier soir un coucher de soleil citron malade mystérieux d'extraordinaire beauté – des cyprès bleu de

17 See 'Sentence construction,' pp. 68-69.
18 See Ronald Dorn, "Refiler à Saintes-Maries?"
19 See 'Conjugation,' pp. 66-67.
prusse des arbres à feuilles mortes de tous les tons rompus là contre c’était pas piqué des vers.' Here, the contrast is striking. After a description that illustrates the effort Van Gogh put into his writing, the familiar expression *pas piqué des vers* (‘not half bad’) is at the very least surprising;

- 750:45: `Rembrandt est surtout magicien et Delacroix un homme de dieu, de tonnerre de Dieu et de foutre la paix au nom de dieu.' Here we find a lively incursion into the popular register. The meaning of this sentence can be guessed but is difficult to define.

The oral origins of the above usages of the popular register are obvious. But Van Gogh’s letters contain many other traces of oral derivation, which sometimes disrupt the thread of what is being said:

- *ma foi* is often placed where it would serve as a pause or create an effect of pronounced affirmation in spoken language. The absence of punctuation here combines with the effect sought by Van Gogh and confuses the wording:

  845:09: ‘Pourtant je me fais vieux tu sais et la vie me parait passer plus vite [...] l’avenir plus mystérieux et ma foi encore un peu plus sombre.’ We may safely assume that in this example *ma foi* has nothing to do with the painter’s religious faith, even if the grammatical construction might permit this reading;

- Van Gogh often uses the adverbial pronoun *en* for emphasis: 606:44: ‘il était hors de lui lorsqu’il s’agissait d’en gagner de l’argent.’ This use is also attested to with *de*

  617:122: ‘Bien des choses me seraient égales mais non pas celle là de chose’; 707:63: ‘tu n’as pas toute la tienne de part au soleil.’ This usage is again characteristic of spoken language;

- As in speech, the Dutch painter never hesitates to double adjectives or adverbs in order to lend weight to his words: 710:244: ‘C’est une consolation bien beau maigre.’

- 611:19: ‘j’en avais assez vu de sa barraque.’ Van Gogh must have heard the word ‘baraque’ and he uses it more often than he had certainly encountered it written. His visual memory, generally very efficient in reproducing the correct spelling of a word, is thus of no help to him here. The incorrect doubling of ‘*t* in *baraque* therefore appears to be the result of improvised spelling based on an oral source;*

- 615:4:1: ‘va l’en voir maintenant des femmes dans le monde tu verras que tu réussiras – vrai – des artistes et cela. Tu verras que cela tournera comme cela et tu n’y perdras pas grand chose allez.’ This passage sounds exactly like barroom chatter and it is difficult to grasp its meaning in its entirety;

- The influence of the spoken word can be gauged by letter 720 and those immediately following it. Gauguin has just arrived at the Yellow House and the epistle contains a much greater number of examples of ‘spoken French’ than found previously. This phenomenon continues throughout Gauguin’s stay: 726:34: ‘L’un ou l’autre veut-il acheter pourtant bon alors ils n’ont qu’à s’adresser directement à moi!’ 735:91: ‘La peinture est le métier que tu sais et *bizarre* nous n’avons peut-être pas tort de chercher à garder notre cœur humain.’

**Belles lettres**

The 200 or so literary titles identifiable in Van Gogh’s correspondence bear witness to the importance he attached to literature. The painter readily tells his correspondents about the books he has more or less recently read, gives advice about reading matter and quotes passages he considers worthy of special note. He also comments on the books’ plot, style or moral scope. In his own writing traces of his reading can be found in his choice of terms, images and stylistic figures.

Only rarely can it be established that a phrase or passage derives directly from a literary source. The following examples, however, are representative of the influence of certain authors, even if it remains impossible to prove they originated in their writings:

- 615:54: ‘voilà ce qu’il y a de fort mauvais les émotions morales de tristesse ou de déceptions nous minent plus que la noce nous dis je qui nous trouvons être les heureux propriétaires de coeurs dérangés.’ The use of the adverb *fort* brands the passage from the outset with Van Gogh’s desire to write well, but it is above all the adjective *heureux* placed before *coeurs dérangés* that relates the passage to the omnipresent ironic tone of Voltaire’s *Candide*, a work from which he quotes repeatedly, and from which he derives numerous lessons in optimism: 708:67: ‘Allons tout va
toujours pour le mieux dans Ce meilleur des mondes – où nous avons – toujours selon l’excellent père Pangloss, le bonheur ineffable de nous trouver;

– 615:14: ‘et les perspectives lointaines larges et tranquilles à lignes horizontales se degradant jusqu’à la chaîne des Alpes – si célèbres par les hauts faits d’escalades de Tartarin PCA et du club Alpin.’ Van Gogh is generally rather sparing with metaphors. The qualifier ‘tranquille’ applied to ‘lignes’ reveals his literary mood at the time the paragraph was written. In what follows it is no great surprise to encounter ‘les hauts faits d’escalade de Tartarin PCA,’ a direct reference to Tartarin dans les Alpes by Alphonse Daudet, a book that had had a particularly profound effect on him. Daudet also inspires him in 654:1: ‘Je ne retrouve pas ici la gaieté meridionale dont Daudet parle tant au contraire une mignardise fade une nonchalance sordide mais n’empêche que le pays est beau.’ The ‘mignardise fade’ and the ‘nonchalance sordide’ are very unusual associations for Van Gogh, who generally confines himself to simpler forms of words;

– 628:19: ‘Et le cher docteur Ox, je veux dire notre Suédois Mouriès moi je l’aimais assez parceque il allait dans ce mechant monde candidement et avec bonté avec ses lunettes et parceque je lui supposais un cœur plus vierge que bien des coeurs et meme avec plus d’innocence à la droiture que n’en ont des plus malins. Et puisque je savais qu’il ne faisait pas de la peinture depuis longtemps cela m’était bien égal que son travail était le comble du niais.’ Here, as with the appearance of the metaphor in the previous example, the reference to Dr Ox by Jules Verne leads Van Gogh down the literary path. ‘Avec ses lunettes,’ a badly constructed detail in the wording, betrays the painter’s stamp. Van Gogh sometimes composes his text on a literary theme, with a literary language he then makes his own;

– Another example of literary composition written under the direct influence of an author of whom he is fond is a passage relating to the search for a motif that is close to his heart: 650:47: ‘Mais quand donc ferai-je le ciel étainé ce tableau qui toujours me préoccupe – hélas hélas c’est bien comme le dit l’excellent copain Cyprien dans “en ménage” de J. K. Huysmans: les plus beaux tableaux sont ceux que l’on rêve en fumant des pipes dans son lit mais qu’on ne fait pas. S’agit pourtant de les attaquer quelqu’incompétent qu’on se sente vis à vis des ineffables perfections de splendeurs glorieuses de la nature.’ The rhetorical question at the start of the passage, plus the ‘ineffables perfections de splendeurs glorieuses de la nature’ that frame the reference to Huysmans, demonstrate the influence literature experts on Van Gogh’s language.

The cases cited in this study have shown the numerous linguistic imperfections encountered in Van Gogh’s correspondence, whose quality seems only to grow under the direct influence of his favourite writers. The impression resulting from this examination is bound to be damaging for the author of these admirable letters. The examples below may, however, soften our too-severe judgement of his prose:

– 701:15: ‘c’est chic comme du vrai vrai Manet.’ Today, the form of these words appears familiar, even a little childish. But in the 19th century chic meant ‘ease of painting pictures with effect.’ This example may serve as a warning to anyone who would judge Van Gogh’s linguistic tribulations too hastily. The same is true of the adverbial use of the adjective ferme, the knowledge of which is generally not very widespread. Van Gogh the allophone knows of it and uses it actively: 705:100: ‘Je tiendrai cela ferme.’ He also complains in 643:16 of being ‘boulotté(e) par les moustiques.’

The use of the rare verb bouloter, which he could have replaced with mordre or piquer, is one of the many proofs of his lively ability to assimilate language in an appropriate and correct manner;

– Letter 642 begins with a remark on Zola and Voltaire. As has been noted above, literary references often lead Van Gogh into a form of literary composition. However, it is difficult to claim that the following passage was directly inspired by either author. One would tend to favour the former, but it is more likely that the evocation of these two writers was only a spark: 642:7: ‘des escaliers démolis à demi, des fenêtres ogivales en ruines, des blocs de blanc rochers couverts de lichen et des pans de mur écrasés éparpillés çà et là dans la verdure, […]’ In the following passage, a reference to the work of Monticelli produces a similar effect: 639:9: ‘Hier j’étais au soleil couchant dans une bruyère pierreuse où croissent des chênes très petits et tor-

20 Cf. ‘Spelling,’ pp 70-71
It is difficult to make a clear distinction between the different artistic stimuli that trigger the transition to a more literary style in Van Gogh's writing. Sometimes, in accordance with the spirit of the century, these stimuli are mingled: 725:58: 'Je ne sais si tu comprendras qui l'on puisse dire de la poésie rien qu'en bien arrangeant les couleurs comme on peut dire des choses consolantes en musique. de même les lignes bizarres cherchées et multipliées ser-

In conclusion...

In his letters in French Van Gogh proves that he had a great facility for expression. Inevitably, despite his obvious application and a strong will to learn, he failed to master all the grammatical niceties required at the level of language sought to tackle. All the same, little hampered by this relative ignorance, he was capable of adapting his style – and to some extent the register in which he expressed himself – to the circumstances and to his audience. The paternal, affectionate tone he takes with his young friend Emile Bernard contrasts strongly with the respectful one he reserved for certain letters to Gauguin, his elder. And if Van Gogh was capable of writing a formally friendly letter to Mme Ginoux, he could also show himself distant and cold with Jo, his brother's wife, when he had to reply to her letter although she had not yet been introduced to him except by mail. Pretentious with Isaacson, a Dutch painter, elevated with Aurier, the art critic, politely authoritarian with Wil, his sister, Van Gogh was above all capable of adopting all these styles, deliberately or not, when he writes to Theo: his eag of saying things often says more than the things themselves. For anyone interested in the documentary scope of Van Gogh's correspondence, it is thus necessary to be familiar with the peculiarities of the language in which this correspondence is written. Far from resorting to slapdash expression, Van Gogh, conscious of his status as a modern artist and a lover of French literature, attached a great importance to it.

Under the painter's pen, French becomes a terrible battlefield, the scene of a clash between a will for correctness, born from his passion for French culture, and an intransigent need to express what he feels must be expressed. The forces are unequal. The will to expression always carries the day over the desire for grammatical correctness, even if the latter never admits defeat. The perpetual imbalance thus created between signifier and signified...
gives meaning to Van Gogh’s French prose. From this perspective, it is no longer astonishing to note that he neglects the least significant elements of French – punctuation, accents, formal written signs such as hyphens and cedillas – while at the same time toiling fruitlessly to master the imperfect subjunctive, which would bear witness to an elevated level of language and consequently signify that the man using it belongs to a certain kind of elite.

The powerful stylistic effects Van Gogh sought in some of his prose almost always resulted in an abandonment of syntactical conventions in favour of a juxtaposition of terms freed for the most part from the non-significant elements of the language. This mechanism, which is seen just as often in his frequent use of the telegraphic style as in his many abrupt leaps from one idea to another without transition, is one of the essential components of his use of language. What appears at first sight to be abstruse and disordered is to a great extent the result of drastic selection, carried out systematically within the realm of the French language, closed though it may be to personal initiatives. ‘En tant que quant à moi’ is without doubt the phrase that best characterises Van Gogh’s use of language: it is not correct, but it is perfectly clear. And that is the essence of the man.

Concordance of the letter numbers

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fig 1
Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
A Dutchman in the south of France:
Van Gogh's 'romance' of Arles

Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutynski

The lure of the Mediterranean was as strong for a Dutchman as for any northerner seeking profit and adventure in the warm climate and foreign culture of southern Europe. As Van Gogh remembered when visiting Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer at the end of May 1888, his Uncle Jan, with whom he stayed in Amsterdam during 1874-75—the latter was by then a rear admiral—had himself sailed the Mediterranean [622/499]. Dutch merchants and sailors had been an important presence there since the late 16th century. By the 19th century, the developing Italian and French Rivieras had become the favourite winter destinations of the well-to-do for holidays and convalescence. Uncle Cent, for example, the successful art dealer who had sponsored Van Gogh's career at Goupil & Cie, wintered every year at Menton on the French Riviera (Côte d'Azur) because of his ill health. Artists followed. Félix Ziem's career was launched in the 1840s by the patronage of the British and Russian aristocracy residing in Nice. Claude Monet explored the potential of the coast in 1884, reporting his progress to his dealer Durand-Ruel, and returned in 1888 (fig. 1). Van Gogh mentions both Ziem and Monet in his correspondence, as well as Paul Cézanne and Auguste Renoir. Supported modestly by his brother Theo, Vincent had neither patrons nor a dealer. Something of a convalescent, he travelled south as winter ended. Summer holidays by the beach and sea bathing, developed on the Baltic and Channel coasts, were just spreading to the Mediterranean, as Van Gogh noted [622/499]. Neither a summer holidaymaker nor wintering patient, he chose as his destination Arles, some 40 kilometres up the Rhône from the sea, rather than the coast itself.

Van Gogh arrived in Arles on 20 February 1888, and stayed until his departure for the asylum at Saint-Rémy on 8 May 1889, ending his stay in the south of France a year later. The voyage south was motivated by his need to escape the stress of the modern metropolis and by his search for a suitable location in which to create a vital contemporary art. Van Gogh thought of Arles as a starting point for a prolonged trip; on the main line from Paris, it lies close to Marseilles. There are indications in the letters that he also considered the Marseilles region, especially Martigues—a favourite artists' haunt where Félix Ziem painted—as another possible destination [603/479, 606/482]. Once Gauguin arrived, Van Gogh hoped to explore other parts of Provence, particularly the mountains [671/W6]. He never mentions the major centres of Avignon and Aix, where he might have had Cézanne's company. In the event, however, he remained in Arles. He knew a fair bit about the place and its setting before arriving. He apparently chose this small provincial town, surrounded by lush and easily accessible farmland, because it suited his plan to return to painting the countryside and doing portraits of ordinary people. As important to Van Gogh as guidebooks were the writings of Alphonse Daudet, whose fictional Provence lay all around Arles.

Van Gogh imagined the French south, le Midi, as a land of sun and colour that would restore his health and provide the model for a new art [587/489, 576/W1]. In fact,
restoring his health was a precondition for this. As he advised his sister before leaving for Arles, ‘what is required in art nowadays is something very much alive, very strong in colour, very much intensified, so try to intensify your own health and strength and life a little’ [576/W1]. Such statements help us understand Van Gogh’s way of painting Arles and its surroundings. Seen against the backdrop of expanding industrial employment, his colourful representations of the Arlesian countryside can be considered a ‘romance’ of the country. Romance evokes the sense of fantasy and strong feeling that Van Gogh attached to the southern countryside and its representation. It is also a particularly appropriate term for historic and geographic reasons. In modern aesthetic usage, the term ‘romantic’ refers back to late-medieval romances, which are viewed as a precedent for the liberation of feeling and imagination in romantic art and literature from classical reason and rules. In its original medieval meaning, a romance was a tale of adventure, chivalry or love. The Provence of the troubadours was the setting for many such romances, as Van Gogh well knew, and this literary tradition coloured views of the region. However, rather than produce medievalising images of Provence, he painted a vision of the south as exotic. Substituting for a displacement in time one in space, Van Gogh’s bright, intensely coloured paintings situate contemporary Arles in a Mediterranean world that occupies a position vis-à-vis European modernity rather like that of the Orient of the orientalists.

Choosing Arles

Tourists were warned against the rigours of Provence outside the mountain-sheltered paradise of the Côte d’Azur that Monet had painted (fig. 1); guidebooks told them to expect a dusty and rocky landscape, intense summer heat, the violent mistral and mosquitoes. The mistral, a cold and powerful north-westerly wind, and the intense summer sun were also constant sources of trouble for artists working outdoors, as were mosquitoes and flies [842/106, 843/99]. For the tourist, the compensation lay in visiting the outstanding antique and medieval monuments of towns such as Arles, where the women’s beauty and folk costumes could also be admired. Local elites, nostalgic for the Provençal past, shared this admiration. Catering to regional, metropolitan and tourist markets, painters and photographers regularly depicted these sites, monuments and costumes. In the 1880s, the field was crowded: many painters were working in Arles producing picturesque views of its medieval ruins and using them as settings for genre paintings. Many of these paintings were exhibited locally in the shop window of the Maison Bompard, on Place de la République. Soon after arriving, Van Gogh ‘had a visit from two amateur artists, a grocer who sells painting materials as well and a magistrate’ [585/467]. The grocer, whom he had probably met buying artist’s supplies, was almost certainly Jules Armand Ronin who painted a summer evening’s view at Montmajour in 1888 (location unknown) and an Arlésienne the following year (Arles, Musée Arlaten). Summer 1888 seems to have been a particularly active time for visiting artists. According to the weekly arts chronicle of the Homme de Bronze, four professional artists, including Vincent van Gogh, joined several amateurs working in the streets of the town and outside the walls, in the Alyscamps and at Montmajour. José Belon was completing his Jealous, she interrupts the farandole (fig. 2) for the Paris Salon of 1889; it is set in the paleo-Christian cemetery of the Alyscamps, before the Chapelle Saint-Accurse, which he had been drawing on the spot. A Monsieur Stein
was ‘painting the courtyard of an ancient and remarkable house in the rue des Arènes.’ Alfred Casile, from Marseilles, was ‘installed at Montmajour to reproduce the magnificent ruins’ (Avignon, Musée Calvet); and M. Vincent, an impressionist painter, works at night, we are told; by gaslight on one of our squares.’ Unlike Belon, Stein and Casile, Van Gogh produced a resolutely modern image of the town in his Café terrace at night (P 487 JH 1580), a night-time view of Place du Forum.

Like the impressionists with whom he was identified in the local weekly, Van Gogh was interested in contemporary life and not the aura of the past. He did not pursue relations with the French artists working locally. With Castile, who had been friendly with the impressionists in Paris in the early 1880s, he would have had more in common, but the two appear not to have met. Van Gogh preferred to associate with the foreign artists working in the countryside around Arles, all of whom were painting the contemporary rural world. Although the Arles of history and tradition did not interest Van Gogh, its picturesque possibilities did not escape him. He regularly drew and painted at the ruined abbey of Montmajour early in his stay and, in late October, took Paul Gauguin to paint the ancient burial ground of the Alpiscamps. But, with these and a few other exceptions, Van Gogh largely shunned the town of Arles, turning his back on it to depict the surrounding fields and rural labour instead. One can only conclude that he chose Arles as a convenient location from which to paint the Midi as he envisaged it, as a colourful, rural utopia.

This vision had been formed even before he arrived in Arles, through contemporary literature and images from the history of art. It was strongly influenced by the paintings of Adolphe Monticelli and the writings of Alphonse Daudet. Arles was the perfect centre from which to paint that world. It was on the Paris-Lyon-Marseille railway line and close to Marseilles, where Monticelli had lived, painting the surrounding countryside. Van Gogh admired the older artist’s work immensely and felt that he was in some sense continuing it. He praised Monticelli (fig. 5) as the consummate southern colourist working from the motif, but also noted his nostalgic imagery of courtiers and fêtes champêtres. Once in Arles, Van Gogh intended to visit Marseilles to examine the art scene, buy art supplies (including Ziems’s non-fading blue) and look for paintings by Monticelli (figs 48/49). He even fantasised that when he and Gauguin went, he would stroll along the Cannebière, the city’s principal commercial boulevard, ‘with a grand southern air,’ dressed like Monticelli, ‘with an enormous yellow hat, a black velvet jacket, white trousers, yellow gloves [and] a bamboo cane’ [67g/98]. The Dutch artist’s boldest plan included setting up a ‘permanent exhibition’ of contemporary impressionist painting there, to complement the return from the hunt, 1866, Washington, Corcoran Museum of Art.

5 Raymond Williams, Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society, rev. ed. London & New York 1983, pp. 274-76.
6 Michael Herzfeld, Anthropology through the looking-glass: critical ethnography in the margins of Europe, Cambridge 1989, pp. 64-70 uses the term ‘Mediterranéenne’, which he first coined in 1982, for this representation in anthropology.
8 Maison Bompard, a family business, was a decorator’s shop; C. Bompard was an amateur artist whose Tambourine decorated with an Arlésienne of 1887 is now in the Musée Arlaten; he also painted Algerian subjects.
10 Homme de Bronze 9 (30 September 1888), p. 2.
12 Monticelli died in 1886. The Van Gogh brothers were involved in buying and promoting his work, in competition with the dealers Alexander Reid from Glasgow and E. J. van Wisseingham from Amsterdam, just before Vincent left for Arles; the debates continued in the letters. Theo arranged the publication Monticelli: impressions d’un artiste, Paris 1890, with text by the critic Paul Gauget and lithographic plates by the artist Auguste Lauzet. On Monticelli’s reputation and Vincent van Gogh’s admiration for him see Aaron Sheon, Monticelli: his contemporaries, his influence, Pittsburgh 1978 and idem, ‘Thea van Gogh, publisher: the Monticelli album,’ Van Gogh Museum Journal (2000), pp. 53-61.
others in Paris, The Hague and London [58/463, 599/470, 591/471], for which his own studio, the Yellow House as it came to be known, would serve as the storehouse [60/3/460].

However, Monticelli’s Marseilles was, like Paris, too large and urban for Van Gogh to want to settle there; Arles was of a more modest size (about 25,000 inhabitants), reminding him of Breda and Mons [579/485]. It must have seemed an appropriate starting point for his ‘long journey in the Midi.’ Van Gogh’s image of the south was strongly influenced by things he had read. He avidly consumed contemporary French literature and greatly enjoyed Daudet’s series about Tartarin, the intrepid lion hunter from Tarascon, with its amusing caricatures of southern character and life. Arles is only 15 kilometres to the south and, after settling there, Van Gogh did make a trip in early June to see the town where Tartarin’s adventures had taken place [628/498]. Daudet’s windmill, in which he claimed to have written his immensely popular Lettres de mon moulin, was also close by, at Fontvieille; Van Gogh visited the village many times and depicted the mills on the hills nearby (F 1486 JJ 1496), but he makes no mention in his letters of either the book or Daudet in this context.

The south of France was also becoming a focus of interest for contemporary avant-garde painters; a number of impressionists were working there in the 1880s. Paul Cézanne, a native, painted the landscape around Aix and L’Estaque; Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir worked along the Mediterranean coast. To a considerable extent, Van Gogh based his expectations of the southern landscape on their paintings, though once in Arles he quickly realised that geology, vegetation and, to some extent, climate differed. Nevertheless, he saw the pervasive bright sunlight and clear air of the south as giving rise to a shared vision of natural vitality in these impressionist paintings. For Van Gogh, Cézanne’s work, which he regretted not knowing better, represented the harsher aspect of the south, an aspect that came to the fore as the dry summer weathersettled in and golden tones predominated [612/488, 627/497]. Thinking of Renoir’s pictures, he expected to find gardens and flowers everywhere around him [612/488]; although he did not immediately find them, he was constantly reminded of Renoir’s ‘pure, clean line’ by the crisp vision afforded by the ‘clear air’ [605/481].

Thinking no doubt of Monet’s paintings, he noted that nature in Arles was ‘very different from what it must be at Bordighera, Hyères, Genoa, Antibes, where there is less mistral, and where the mountains give a totally different character. Here, except for a more intense colour, it reminds one of Holland, everything is flat’ [654/502].

Situated just north of the delta of the Rhône, about ten metres above sea level, Arles was surrounded by drained and irrigated land with rocky outcrops such as Montmajour announcing the Alpilles to the north and east.

Van Gogh’s artistic project differed fundamentally from that of Cézanne, Renoir and Monet, and he therefore sought a different countryside to paint. Focusing on the lush farms and gardens and on rural labour, he began to draw and paint the orchards and fields to the north and east of Arles soon after he arrived in February. He probably consulted a guidebook before journeying south and he seems to have known a certain amount about the town. He visited its two museums and many of its monuments in the first days of his stay, offering pithy commentaries to his brother: ‘The museum in Arles [Musée Réattu] is a horror and a humbug, and ought to be in Tarascon [Tartarin’s hometown]. There is also a museum of antiquities, but these are genuine’ [580/464]. He grew to admire the porch of Saint-Trophime, always calling it Gothic and never quite reconciling himself to its apocalyptic imagery [589/470], and he visited the Roman arena for a bullfight one Sunday [596/474]. Guidebooks offered some information about the landscape and agriculture of the immediate region. Joanne’s (1881) signalled the plain between Tarascon and Arles as the most fertile in the Bouches-du-Rhône and Murray’s (1888) noted that where it was irrigated Provençal land was very productive.

Surely, Van Gogh chose Arles because of its comfortable size and the accessibility of the countryside. He was by no means alone in his focus. He soon met several other northern artists working in the villages nearby. Christian Mourier Petersen from Denmark and the American Dodge Macknight were already in Fontvieille, and the Belgian Eugène Boch arrived a little later, after Mourier Petersen had left for Paris. Like Gauguin and the American and Scandinavian painters of Brittany, these artists were studying rural France.


The romance of the country

Van Gogh set to work enthusiastically painting the flowering orchards on the outskirts of Arles in March and April, soon after he arrived. In June and July, following the seasons, he concentrated on flowering gardens and field studies. The productive fields and gardens seen in his drawings and paintings were made possible by the canals draining the marshes surrounding Arles to the north, the Canal du Vigueirat (early 18th century) and the Canal du Voulanges (1642). Because some branch canals were filled in the 19th century, the marshes reappeared and were only finally eliminated early in the 19th century. These extensive farmlands, stretching up to Tarascon, form part of the Trebon. Van Gogh seems to have confused this area with the better-known semi-desert of the Crau; unaware that the artist stood, and the distant Alpilles, with the ruined abbey of Montmajour visible on the left. It is a peaceful vision of an industrious rural world hardly touched by modernity, with an Arlésienne in the foreground garden and other figures working and walking in the distance. Van Gogh compared the breadth and depth of the motif to the Dutch views of Salomon Koninck from the 17th century and Georges Michel’s and Jules Dupré’s French landscapes from the 19th (1649/1496), while the colour reminded him of the golden tones of the paintings of Cézanne and Delacroix (1847/1847). Always informing Van Gogh’s vision of Arles, too, was the feeling that he was in Japan. By overlaying the decorative colour of Japanese prints and the spatial schemata of Dutch 17th-century landscape paintings, created with the aid of a perspective frame in The harvest, Van Gogh

twix the canal bank at the edge of town, on which the artist stood, and the distant Alpilles, with the ruined abbey of Montmajour visible on the left. It is a peaceful vision of an industrious rural world hardly touched by modernity, with an Arlésienne in the foreground garden and other figures working and walking in the distance. Van Gogh compared the breadth and depth of the motif to the Dutch views of Salomon Koninck from the 17th century and Georges Michel’s and Jules Dupré’s French landscapes from the 19th (1649/1496), while the colour reminded him of the golden tones of the paintings of Cézanne and Delacroix (1847/1847). Always informing Van Gogh’s vision of Arles, too, was the feeling that he was in Japan. By overlaying the decorative colour of Japanese prints and the spatial schemata of Dutch 17th-century landscape paintings, created with the aid of a perspective frame in The harvest, Van Gogh


14 Paul Signac started to paint at Saint-Tropez in 1887 and settled there in 1892; it is unlikely, though, that Van Gogh even saw any of those works.

15 Adolphe Joanne, Itinéraire de la France: Provence, Alpes Maritimes, Côte, Paris 1881, p. 42, and Murray, op. cit. (note 7), p. 111. Van Gogh would encounter the more austere regime of wheat and olives, considered to be traditional to the Mediterranean region, later, in the dry and rocky environment of the Alpilles around Saint-Rémy, for which see the author’s Van Gogh’s paintings of olive trees and cypresses at St. Rémy,’ The Art Bulletin 75 (December 1993), pp. 647-70. The different environments correspond to an important psychological break.


makes the picture resonate with both an exotic ‘Japanese dream’ [611/487] and a pre-modern echo of ‘the Holland of Ruysdael, Hobbema and Ostade’ [654/501].

The artist’s most cherished aim in this period was to do a series of contemporary portraits [657/516, 658/517], continuing the studies of peasants that he had executed in Holland [669/81]. In early August he painted two likenesses of a farm worker called Patience Escalier. Van Gogh had begun making portraits in June, with a soldier and a young woman posing for him; it was with special tenacity that, in August, he pursued a peasant model. His interest may have turned to the subject because of a visit to the painters Macknight and Boch in Fontvieille. ‘The village where they’re staying is real Millet, small-time peasants and nothing else, absolutely rural and intimate’ [652/514]. ‘Peasant,’ however, was a charged term, certainly as applied at this late date and to the poor farm labourers living near the Porte de la Cavalerie among whom Van Gogh found his models. Escalier was a typical member of the rural proletariat: he had been a bouvier or cowboy in the Camargue, the Rhône delta to the south of Arles, and had since worked as a gardener in the town itself. In the first version of the portrait (fig. 5), ‘the orange colours flashing like lightning, vivid as red-hot iron’ and ‘the luminous tones of old gold in the shadows’ are meant to suggest ‘the furnace of the height of harvest time’ in the south [665/520]. The oranges and reds in the face are intensified by the complementary contrasts of the peasant’s blue smock and the green background. In the second version (F 444, JH 1548), an intense orange background visualises the powerful sunlight and heat.

Van Gogh related the ‘poor peasantry’ of Provence to the images of Jean-François Millet he knew so well [661/519], and to the ‘wild beast’ [669/81] described by Emile Zola. Stressing this primitivising vision, he asked his brother to compare the first version of the painting with Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s Poudre de riz (fig. 6). Theo’s portrait of a woman preparing to apply her make-up over a rice-powder base [665/520]. Van Gogh used this contrast between the rustic vigour of Arles and the refinement of the capital to underline his preference for the former and to indicate his return to the project of painting the countryside that had motivated him in the Netherlands. The contrast also makes plain the dependence of the rural image on modernity: it is painted for a modern urban audience and against encroaching modernity. Van Gogh depicted the contemporary countryside and not some nostalgic vision of a rural past. His paintings show the land around Arles as it had been transformed by new ownership and markets. Agricultural land was increasingly owned by distant proprietors and exploited for greater yields and cash crops. Escalier had retired from life as a cowboy on a big estate in the Camargue to tend the market gardens of Arlesian cultivators working for urban markets. Increasingly, the fruit and produce were taken to markets outside Arles by train. It was this modern agricultural world that provided Van Gogh with his motifs of orchards and his views of the fields around Arles. As noted above, he was generally interested in contemporary life rather than the past of historical monuments and folk tradi-
Van Gogh’s paintings of Arles are, however, highly selective in subject and his expressive, coloured vision is charged with ‘romance.’ Emphasising the rural quality of Arlesian labour, he did only a few paintings of shipping on the Rhône and none of the industrial activity at the gasworks or the extensive repair shops of the railway. His selection, then, did not reflect contemporary reality. Agricultural employment had dropped from supporting almost half the working population of Arles at the beginning of the century to less than 20 percent by the 1880s, while sailors’ work on the river had virtually disappeared with the arrival of the railway. After 1848, the railway workshops and, later, new industries provided replacement jobs.

A number of paintings and drawings nevertheless stand out in Van Gogh’s Arlesian production because they feature industry and railway yards as a prominent backdrop to the fields and rural labour at harvest time. Traditional agricultural life and activities are the focus of the images, yet their contrast with recent industrial development is crucial to Van Gogh’s romanticised vision of the town and countryside. *Harvesters* (fig. 7) shows the wheat harvest in June with Arles in the background. Deliberately using a steep perspective in a vertical format, Van Gogh produces a primitivising painting like an image from a 19th-century almanac. Three-quarters of the composition is taken up by the landscape, with one-quarter left for the town and sky. The two parts are differentiated by brushwork and a complementary colour contrast: sunlit yellow fields and shadowed violet buildings below a pale blue sky. The wheatfields are brighter and more extensive yet the distant smoky town is easily their match. Our eyes are drawn to its dark narrow band, which forms the inescapable horizon of our vision. Van Gogh placed two labouring figures deep in space, drawing us into the composition. The reaper and his female companion stacking
the sheaves of grain appear just below the railway line, still safely contained in the fields, but with their manual work given a special poignancy because of the industrial setting. This is clearly hand labour, despite the availability of mechanical reapers in the Midi by the 1880s; it is not entirely old-fashioned, however, as the man now uses a scythe rather than a sickle.

In *Summer evening* (fig. 8), the town of Arles rises insistently over the acid-yellow wheatfields silhouetted against the setting sun. There are no labourers in the fields at this late hour, but the stacks of the workshops continue to belch smoke. Against this dramatic backdrop, a couple walks out from town in the early evening, the wind blowing through the ripe wheat. Here the huge orb of the sun, setting improbably in the southwest, and its yellow glare are meant to overwhelm the townscape and absorb the fertile fields and strolling lovers in the cycle of nature. Like *Harvesters*, the image brings out the ‘romance’ of the countryside by dramatising the contrast between the mechanical and the organic, between the industrial belt and agricultural country. There is also a subsidiary tension between the town’s ancient monuments and the industrial smokestacks. Van Gogh was well aware of the possibilities for historicist romance around Arles. Writing in July about the second series of drawings he produced at Montmajour, the picturesque monastery just outside town, he noted that the landscape at sunset was ‘as romantic as you can get, like Monticelli,’ and observed that ‘one would not have been at all surprised to see knights and ladies returning from hawking appear suddenly or to hear the voice of an old Provençal troubadour’ (85g/908). Van Gogh never painted such a scene, but he visualised a similar ‘romance’ by depicting lovers walking at sunset in the wheatfields against the backdrop of smokestacks, or harvesters working in the heat of the day at the edge of town. What we are given is not the realism of everyday rural labour, but rather a poetic and picturesque contrast of tradition and modernity; in the ex-
pressive charge of that contrast lies Van Gogh’s ‘romance’ of the countryside.

Statistically, these paintings are an insignificant minority compared to the overwhelming number of purely agricultural images; but they are immensely revealing about the deeper meaning of all Van Gogh’s depiction of rural Arles. In them, he acknowledged modernity, but constrained its signs (railways, industry) in an exaggerated, distorted perspective full of tensions created by bold colour and flat, decorative surfaces. He intensified the impact of nature and the human presence within it, fighting to preserve a place for them in a modernising world. Paintings such as Harvesiers and Summer evening remind us that in all of Van Gogh’s agricultural images, the modernity of industrial labour and production is the invisible other that motivates the intense experience of the exotically coloured landscape and the ‘romance’ of the Arlesian countryside.

An exoticism of colour

When Van Gogh thought about the south, he characterised it in terms of colour. From Paris he wrote to the English painter H.M. Livens, whom he had met in Antwerp: ‘in spring – say February or even sooner, I may be going to the south of France, the land of blue tones and gay colours’ [572/4598]. He also notified his sister that it was his ‘plan to go as soon as possible for a time to the south, where there is even more colour and even more sun’ [576/W5]. As Van Gogh familiarised himself with the countryside around Arles, he frequently compared it to the flat, irrigated fields of Holland; but he always insisted on the very different colouration. This difference corresponded to the changed modern palette of the impressionists, as he explained in a later letter to his sister: ‘You will understand that nature in the south cannot be painted with the palette of [Anton] Mauve, for example, who belongs to the north, and who is, and will always remain, a master of grey. But the contemporary palette is distinctly colourful – sky blue, orange, pink, vermilion, bright yellow, bright green, bright wine-red, violet’ [595/W3]. In truth, the intensely sunlit Midi was not so much colourful as washed out or even white by nature, as Paul Signac noted in his comments on the Dutch artist’s paintings in 1894.

Van Gogh chose to represent the bright light of the south by intensifying local colours and using a system of induced complementaries to create vibrant harmonies. In his opinion, ‘by intensifying all the colours, one arrives once again at calm and harmony’ [595/W5]. At the end of his Parisian stay, he developed a new art of colour in a small group of paintings strongly influenced by Japanese prints and modern colour theory. He first applied this new palette consistently in Arles, in order to create vital images of the exotic south such as The harvest (fig. 4) or the Portrait of Patience Escalier (fig. 5), which he regarded as counterparts to the drained, over-refined life of modern Paris.

Southern colour was a cultural construct that Van Gogh brought with him from the north; an exoticism, this northern vision produced an image of the exotic south and colourful. With the triumph of the avant-garde between 1890 and 1910, it would dominate the representation of the region; even Signac began to use such a colourful palette in the late 1890s.

The romantic poet and critic Charles Baudelaire posited an aesthetic geography of north and south that split France and Europe in two. In his account, the rational south, where the sun shone and nature needed no supplementation, produced a timeless (classical) art, a sculptural vision based on clear line and tonal modelling. In contrast, the imaginative, mist-filled north gave rise to a modern (romantic) art, a painterly coloured vision. Some 40 years later, the modernist colour vision of the south was explained by Georges Roque: ‘Y a-t-il une palette méditerranénne?’ Critique: revue générale de publications françaises et étrangères 44 (1988), pp. 943-54, and idem, ‘La Méditerranée devient colorée,’ in Françoise Cachin (with Monique Nonne), exhib. cat. La Méditerranée de Courbet à Matisse, Paris (Musée d’Orsay) 2001, pp. 109-36.

23 Eugen Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen: the modernization of rural France, 1870-1914, Stanford 1976, pp. 122-30, notes the changes in equipment, the slowness with which they were adopted in the countryside and the variable dates of adoption for different localities.


26 Charles Baudelaire, ‘Salon of 1846,’ as quoted and analysed in Christopher L. Miller, Blank darkness: Africanist discourse in French, Chicago & London 1985, pp. 74-82. Théophile Thoré (alias Willem Bürger) made much the same distinction between the northern and southern schools, see Salons de T. Thöré, 1867 à 1868, 2 vols., Paris 1870, vol. 2, pp. 370-71; similar distinctions also operate in Charles Blanc, Histoires des peintres de toutes les écoles, Paris 1861.
later, Van Gogh identified impressionism and his own work with the colourist tradition in a letter to the Australian painter John Russell, arguing that its future now lay in the Midi. Contemporary artists were in a position to continue colourist painting, he wrote, equipped as they were with ‘universal knowledge’ and an understanding of ‘the colours of the prism and their properties.’ He cited Monticelli’s paintings from the south of France and Delacroix’s from North Africa as precedents. Van Gogh concluded that in order to give the viewer ‘something passionate and eternal – the rich colour and the rich sun of the glorious south,’ local colour should be ignored and ‘the south now be represented by a contraste simultané of colours and their derivations and harmonies, and not by forms and lines in themselves, as the ancients did formerly’ [800/4774]. While it maintained the binary opposition, Van Gogh’s identification of the south with colour was a reversal of Baudelaire’s position. There were powerful cultural reasons for this shift in the system.

When he wrote of the art of the south, the romantic poet was thinking of Italy, classical sculpture, the Renaissance (particularly Raphael) and the art of the academy. As numerous images and texts show, this form of classicism was often also located in the south of France, and this was the vision preferred by the bourgeois elites of the period and the visual artists and writers they supported. However, in the age of French colonialism – colonial troops passed through Arles and Van Gogh even painted them – and with the opening of the Suez Canal, the south of France was increasingly situated as part of a newly orientalised Mediterranean world, which was stereotyped as colourful, exotic and unruly, close to the Near East and North Africa. Daudet’s works, the product of a southern writer catering to a Parisian audience, are a major example of this development. In Tartarin’s overheated imagination and colourful language, the author created a self-conscious caricature of the exotic southern stereotype. Orientalisation of the south was an effect of the discourse of modernity and its historicist division of cultures into ‘universal’ (that is, modern) and ‘historical’ [27]. This new construction of the Midi provided Van Gogh with a ready-made subject for his colouristic painting.

Van Gogh linked the south of France to both North Africa and Japan, seeing all three as sites for the development of a new art of colour: Japan as the origin, the Midi as the present site, and North Africa as the future [644/510, 646/511]. For contemporary Europeans, all three were exotic cultural spaces outside modernity. We know that Van Gogh repeatedly ‘saw’ Japan in the landscapes around Arles. When in late May he travelled across the Camargue to Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, a small fishing village and popular pilgrimage site about 40 kilometres south on the Mediterranean coast, the knowledge that North Africa was the sea’s other shore heightened his perception of the Midi as an exotic, sun-drenched world of colour. Linking the French Mediterranean coast with Africa was a commonplace of contemporary geography and tourist guides. [28] It was Charles Blanc who in 1876 made the crucial connection for art history by linking geography with colour theory in the person of Eugène Delacroix.

Van Gogh had read the well-known essay on Delacroix in Les artistes de mon temps as early as April or May 1885 [497/401]. Here Blanc laid the foundations for Van Gogh’s exoticist vision of the south, linking North Africa, Delacroix and Michel-Eugène Chevreul’s laws of

![fig. 9](Vincent van Gogh, Three cottages, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer (F. 419; JH 1465). 1888. Present location unknown)
complementary colour contrast and setting out the ‘laws of colour’ in a passage that Van Gogh even transcribed. Blanc explained their application using as examples Delacroix’s *Women of Algiers* (Paris, Musée du Louvre) and Jewish wedding (Paris, Musée du Louvre), both then in the Musée du Luxembourg, where Van Gogh could easily have seen them. The lesson echoes in his correspondence from Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer: ‘Now that I have seen the sea here, I feel completely convinced of the importance of staying in the south and of feeling that one must exaggerate the colour even more – with Africa not far from one’ [925/300]. Under the intensely blue Mediterranean sky, complementary contrasts dominated and the soil appeared orange to an artist who was thinking of the proximity of Delacroix’s North Africa [925/308] as he painted *Three cottages*, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer (fig. 9). Van Gogh did not return to the Mediterranean coast, but this coloured vision informs all his Arlesian paintings with the romance of the exotic.

Van Gogh travelled south from Paris with expectations and a certain vision of the Midi. He chose Arles as a starting point for his voyage in a sense because it was not Marseilles but rather a small town with easy access to the rural world. Van Gogh may have known that the land was fertile and, in the hot southern sun, yielded abundant crops. He planned to paint the countryside and the peasants, returning to the subject matter of his Dutch works. Working initially at Montmajour and in the town of Arles, Van Gogh literally crossed paths with several other artists who were painting at these sites. However, he preferred the company of the northern artists working in the surrounding villages to these French artists and local amateurs, who specialized in picturesque views of ruins and Arlesian folklore genre painted in the style of Salon naturalism. While Van Gogh largely ignored the town’s monuments and industry, his views of the rural world on the edge of Arles are suffused with the tensions of encroaching modernity. The ‘romance’ of the countryside found in his images is directly dependent on this presence and its pressures, as the few paintings that explicitly portray the industrial belt of the town as a backdrop to rural activity make clear. To counteract this intrusion, Van Gogh’s paintings of orchards, fields and agricultural labourers are charged with an intense and poignant vitality, expressed above all in their brilliant colour, structured by complementaries based on contemporary colour theory and motivated by the intense sunlight of the region. Van Gogh’s coloured vision transforms the Arlesian views into images of a southern ‘romance.’ Strikingly different from the rural north he had depicted in Holland in the mid-1880s, these paintings situate the landscape and people of the Midi in an exotic Mediterranean world linked to Africa.

27 Hershfeld, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 82-87 and, more generally, Johannes Fabian, *Time and the other: how anthropology makes its object*, New York 1983.

28 Jules Reclus, *Les villes d’hiver de la Méditerranée et les Alpes Martimes*, Paris 1864, p. iv (with thanks to Anne Dymond for this reference) and Murray, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 152-53, referring to the Camargue and Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. According to Amedée Pichot, an engineer with experience in Egypt was brought to work on the draining of parts of the Camargue; cited in Joanne, op. cit. (note 15), p. 52.
Max Liebermann, Bleaching (Zweeloo), 1882-83, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum
Van Gogh, Liebermann and multi-figure naturalism

Art historians researching Van Gogh have so far devoted little more than footnotes to his relationship to the German painter Max Liebermann. It would seem that Liebermann was no more than a fringe figure in Van Gogh’s life, and then perhaps only because his brother Theo had written to him in the autumn of 1883 about the work of this German painter. At the time, both Van Gogh and Liebermann were finding their motifs in the Netherlands, some of them in the very same place, namely in Zweeloo. Following his failed attempt to start a family, Van Gogh had left The Hague and retreated to an impoverished farming region in the east of the country. His interest in Liebermann is revealing, not least because it can be viewed in the context of a certain historical project of the naturalist movement: the unsentimental, multi-figure study of the lower-class milieu – the very same lines along which Van Gogh had been seeking to achieve artistic success since his time in The Hague. Like Liebermann, he now devoted himself to social genre painting, an art form that had been central to naturalism for more than a decade. As regards its status and the seriousness of its themes, its supporters sought to put it on a par with history painting – indeed, in some sense, this new art was even meant to replace it. Such pictures reached their audience through much discussed exhibitions and, more importantly, in the form of reproductions and magazine illustrations. Van Gogh, too, dreamed of succeeding in this field, either as a painter or as an illustrator. He studied the tradition of naturalism and the works of its main exponents in France, the Netherlands and England – and now of Max Liebermann as well. Liebermann had developed a particularly unsentimental version of this type of painting. His art never made any direct appeal to humane feelings but rather intensified realistic scenes via the alienating autonomy of an aesthetic that came more and more under the influence of impressionism.

It was precisely on this account that Liebermann’s paintings were in complete contradiction to that particular poetic quality Van Gogh sought in this art form during the period leading up to his famous *Potato eaters* (F 82 JH 764), which he worked on in April and May 1885. Indeed, this contradiction is just as telling as the way Van Gogh obstinately remained distant from Liebermann while nevertheless concerning himself with his works. Not for nothing did Van Gogh fail to find quite the right avenue to Liebermann’s art. His interest in almost no other significant contemporary artist is so full of conflict, so inhibited by a reluctance strangely mixed with interest.

Although Van Gogh shared Liebermann’s rejection of the philanthropic sentimentality overlaying almost all socially engaged naturalism until well into the 1870s, he did not adopt a detached approach to his subjects, but rather an almost ecstatic empathy, exaggerating, for example, the natural suffering in the faces of the *Potato eaters*, making them seem coarse, almost bestial, and then inviting us to feel with these dehumanised beings and their elementary will to live – and to recognise in their evening meal a human ritual *malgré tout*. His procedure for ridding the scene of the conventions of sentimental naturalism was based on a provisional identification with prejudice, which in a further step was transformed into identification with those people onto whose bodies social, anthropological, even
Darwinistic clichés and preconceptions had been inscribed. Such an approach was, of course, entirely incompatible with what was acceptable in naturalist art at the time, but Van Gogh continued to dream of achieving recognition within the context of the social genre right up until his departure for Paris in the mid-1880s. He was well aware of the fact that his overly empathetic attitude to the impoverished and disadvantaged was something special. What he was not aware of, however, was the fact that he was putting himself beyond the pale of what in the early 1880s was conventionally acceptable as art.

Like Van Gogh, Liebermann sought to reform multi-figure naturalist painting through procedures of empathy beyond the pictorial distance he simultaneously built up; not, however, by empathising with the ugly, feral nature of his subjects but rather by stressing the aesthetic detachedness of the artist’s eye. The apparent indifference with which Liebermann depicts, say, a cobbler’s apprentice or a weaver’s family (fig. 5) does in fact establish a human closeness to the persons shown, but one which, through the impressionist aesthetic and the rendering of materialised light with layers of richly pigmented colour, is free from all conventionally practised poses of sympathy. In altogether contrary ways both Liebermann and Van Gogh changed not only the aesthetic of the social genre painting but also the way the viewer was meant to relate to the maltreated peasants. Liebermann’s aesthetic aloofness stood in marked contrast to Van Gogh’s convulsively heightened empathy. While both mobilised genuine sympathy for their fellow human beings beyond the scope of conventional humanitarian feelings, the one did so by understating the sentimental empathy familiar to the viewer from the paintings of Millet, Breton, Israels and Herkomer, the other by overstating it.

Perhaps surprisingly, Liebermann had a similarly conflicting admiration for Van Gogh. Indeed, the relationship between the two artists, who never knew each other personally, was one of mutual regard on the one hand, and of mutual distancing and disregard on the other. It is a relationship that shows how different the paths of two artists can be, despite their proximity of time and place and the fact that both pursued their aims within the same artistic and programmatic discourse. Liebermann and Van Gogh—a revealing story of a nonetheless enigmatically fleeting confrontation.

**Van Gogh’s first encounter with Liebermann**

Vincent van Gogh first makes mention of the paintings of Max Liebermann in a letter to his brother Theo of September 1885. In it he describes the deserted heath around the town of Hoogeveen, where he has been staying after having left The Hague. The letter clearly identifies the artistic context in which Van Gogh places his interest in the work of this German painter. Liebermann’s name first crops up, apparently incidentally, within a whole chain of associations of the kind that often accompanied Van Gogh’s experience of nature, a kind of never-ending barrage of metaphors. He begins by evoking the poetry of the landscape, with ‘the planes vanishing into infinity,’ and then continues: ‘However, one must not suppose it has to be taken sentimentally; on the contrary, that is what it hardly ever is. In the evening, when a poor little figure is seen moving through the twilight, when that vast sun-scorched earth stands out darkly against the delicate lilac hues of the evening sky, and the very last little dark-blue line at the horizon separates the earth from the sky— that same aggravating, monotonous spot can be as sublime as a Jules Dupré. And the figures, the men and the women, have that very same character—they are not always interesting, but when one looks at them with patience, one is sure to discover their Millet-like quality’ [590/595].

Vincent then asks Theo for money, for he cannot confine himself simply to drawing: ‘[...] painting must be the main thing as much as possible.’ And it is in this connection that he mentions Liebermann, whose work he considers—and here he has no doubt been influenced by Theo’s description—to be quintessentially painterly. The ‘sublime and beautiful’ quality Van Gogh sees in the landscape with the eyes of Jules Dupré and Jean-François Millet—collides with the precision of Liebermann’s technique of colouration, behind which, Van Gogh suspects, there is a system, a system that one must ‘master.’ Van Gogh then moves from Liebermann to the genre and interior painter Gerke Henkes (1844–1927), who has been living and working in The Hague since 1869, and then from him to Hubert von Herkomer (1853–1914), whom he holds in high esteem and whose illustrations and paintings he greatly admires. ‘I had already heard something about Liebermann, but your description, especially of his technique, gives me a better idea of him. His colour must be in-
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finite better than Henkes’—you express it very well: “slate colour dissolving into greyish-yellow and greyish-brown.” I understand it perfectly. That way of painting is delightful if one has mastered it. And the reason I want to paint a great deal is just because I should like to have a certain firmness and system in my technique—though I have heard many people say you must not have a system—such as he and several others have. From your description I see that Liebermann must have something of Herkomer’s manner. Especially in systematically carrying through and analysing those patches of light and shadow caused by sunbeams coming through the leaves, which dazzle many an eye. The other day I saw the large engraving after Herkomer’s “The last muster.” I suppose you have seen it too—what a manly thing!” [390/325].

Since in the very next sentence Van Gogh goes on to express his curiosity about Jules Breton’s ‘Fille d’un mineur,’ we cannot help but ask what the connection can possibly be between Herkomer, Jules Breton and Liebermann? The answer, apparently, is that all three sought to depict, in unsentimental multi-figure paintings, a certain social ambience, their subject matter being drawn mostly from the lower strata of society, whether pre-industrial farmhands or factory workers, whether poorhouses, orphanges or old age retreats.

‘Pen drawings of types from the people’:

Van Gogh’s road to naturalism

It is certainly worthwhile taking a closer look at the scene Van Gogh so eloquently sets when first mentioning Liebermann—with all his impressions reworked through other artists’ eyes. Let us first turn to Gerke Henkes, whom he considered to be inferior to such artists as Liebermann. In 1875, Henkes, who, like Van Gogh, occasionally frequented the local Hague artists’ club Pulchri Studio, had exhibited a painting—The knitting school (fig. 2)—both at the Paris Salon and in Brussels. It was subsequently shown in Amsterdam (1878) and then again in Paris—this time at the Exposition Universelle (The Hague, Museum Mesdag). This picture of young girls knitting under the supervision of a strict instructress was highly praised by contemporary critics. The humorous exaggeration of the figures, however, places Henke’s painting more in the category of a late-Biedermeier genre painting than in that of naturalism per se.

Van Gogh praises Liebermann above all for his plein air painting, for his light effects, which, as he says, ‘dazzle many an eye.’ Other naturalists, too—such as Herkomer—were experimenting with new colouration techniques within the impressionist gamut. Van Gogh appreciated Herkomer primarily as a painter of scenes of a socially concerned nature—old people in public care, for example—which subsequently appeared as wood engravings or lithographs in such publications as the Illustrated London News.

1 See also Gerhard Eimer, Manfred Fritsch and Dieter Hermsdorf, Van Gogh Indizes: Analytischer Schlüssel für die Schriften des Künstlers, Frankfurt am Main 1973, p. 78. This book was a valuable source of information for my research into Van Gogh’s letters.

2 It has not proven possible to identify the Breton painting to which Van Gogh here refers, the subject was not a common one for the artist. Cf. Holister Sturges (ed.), exhib. cat. Jules Breton La chanson des blés, Arles (Musée des Beaux-Arts), Quimper (Musée des Beaux-Arts), Dublin (National Gallery of Ireland) & Paris (Somogy) 2002.

and *The Graphic*. In the art world surrounding the large, increasingly international exhibitions of the period, it was not just the exhibited paintings themselves that played a significant role, but also their reproduction in the press. In his letter, Van Gogh mentions Herkomer’s famous major work *The last master: Sunday in the Royal Hospital, Chelsea* (1875, Merseyside, Lady Lever Art Gallery), which was exhibited with enormous success at the Royal Academy in London in 1875 and again at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1878. The painting had been preceded by an illustration featuring a not quite identical motif in *The Graphic of February* 1871. Yet another version was published as a wood engraving in the same magazine in May 1875. Both the prints and the painting depict Chelsea pensioners at prayer in the hospital chapel, lost in thought and completely resigned to their fate; one of them takes hold of the arm of the man sitting next to him in order to make sure he is still alive – but he is not; it is, in fact, *the last master*.

During his time in The Hague, between the turn of the year 1881-82 and September 1885, Van Gogh had done a great many studies of the modern, industrial and poor quarters of the city’s suburbs, mainly watercoloured pen-and-ink drawings. Moreover, in one group (partially executed in charcoal, partially with a thick carpenter’s pencil) he also tried his hand at multi-figure compositions for press illustrations or oil paintings. That he modelled these works mainly on English magazine illustrations of the 1870s has long been known from his letters, but only the more recent literature has seriously taken this into account. In a letter of 7 or 8 January 1882, Van Gogh enthuses over these illustrations, also mentioning Herkomer’s wood engraving of the Chelsea Hospital, which he refers to as ‘The invalids’: ‘I got an amazing bargain of splendid woodcuts from the *Graphic*, in part printed not from the clichés but from the blocks themselves. Just what I’ve been looking for all this time. Drawings by Herkomer, Frank Holl, Walker and others. I [...] picked the best from an enormous pile of the *Graphic and London News*. They include some superb things, for instance, Houseless and homeless by Fildes (poor people waiting outside a night shelter) and two large Herkomers and many small ones, and the Irish emigrants by Frank Holl and the “Old gate” by Walker, and above all a girls’ school by Frank Holl, and then another large Herkomer, *The invalids*.’ He himself, says Vincent, is endeavouring ‘to make something [...] realistic and yet done with feeling’ [188/165]. A short time later, on 15 February 1882, he even mentions his intention of making ‘pen drawings of types from the people’ for magazines [205/174].

### Autumn 1883: Van Gogh on Liebermann’s trail in Drenthe

It was quite logical for Theo to have recommended Liebermann to his brother as an ideal painter on whom to model himself, for Liebermann was achieving precisely those artistic objectives to which Van Gogh himself aspired at the time. Realistic studies of the proletarian milieu, social genre paintings often executed with an emphatically painterly gesture: the plucking of geese, the bleaching of cloth, plenty of white, time and again, in all its materiality, or the traditional white, red and black dresses of the girls in the Amsterdam orphanage – these were Liebermann’s subjects. His interest in social themes had first been awakened in 1871, after seeing Mihály Munkácsy’s *Making lint: an episode from the Hungarian War of Independence 1848-49* (1871, Budapest, Magyar Nemzeti Galéria), which depicts women making bandaging for wounded soldiers. Further inspiration then came from Paris – Millet, Courbet and Théodule Ribot, as well as Troyon, Daubigny and Corot – and not least from the Hague School. With his often sentimental, often humorously detached character studies of village life, the Hungarian history and genre painter Munkácsy certainly had different artistic intentions than Liebermann – here the ne’er-do-wells and the pub brawls, there the seriousness and dignity of labour, an emphasis on the solitariness of the workers despite the communal nature of their task. Since the autumn of 1872 Liebermann had been taking his themes from ordinary working life in the Netherlands, as in his *Goose pluckers* (1874, Berlin, Nationalgalerie). By 1876, through his copying of the paintings of Frans Hals, Liebermann had given his French-inspired style both a historical foundation and a heightened painterly quality. He oriented himself on the Dutch tradition of Rembrandt and Hals, a tradition in which art critics and historians such as Théophile Thoré and Wilhelm von Bode recognised overtones of Dutch republicanism. It was also in the Netherlands that Liebermann sought and found the motifs for his art. The choice of the country and its tra-
diction lent historical justification both to his socio-political themes and his style of painting, which his Berlin contemporaries scorned as ‘dirty.’ In the autumn of 1878 Liebermann painted a number of scenes of Amsterdam – for example, of the old synagogue in Jodenbreestraat and, later, of the Buergerweeshuis, among them _The Orphanage at Amsterdam_ (1882, Frankfurt am Main, Städelisches Kunstinstitut). In 1880 he devoted himself – like Herkomer before him – to an asylum for old men, a work he exhibited at the Paris Salon a year later (private collection). The republican flavour of this painting did not go unnoticed, either in France or Germany.10

It was a bitterly disappointed Vincent van Gogh who left The Hague on 11 September 1885. Lack of funds now forced him to eke out a scanty living in the heath lands of the eastern provinces. All the same, he never wavered in his intention to make his way in the world as an artist. It was not long after his arrival in Drenthe that Theo advised him to follow Liebermann’s example. During his short stay here, which lasted only until 5 December, the artist struggled to find a way of achieving his goal.11

In a letter to Theo written at the end of September or the beginning of October from the town of Nieuw Amsterdam, ‘from the remotest corner of Drenthe,’ Vincent returns once again to Liebermann, though not without first describing, yet again, the poetry of the landscape: ‘[...] imagine the banks of the canal as miles and miles of, say, Michels or Th. Rousseaus, Van Goyens or Ph. de Konincks. [...] The figures that once in a while appear on these flat lands are full of character, [...] lots of Ostade types among them, physiognomies that put one in mind of pigs or cows.’ Here again Van Gogh simply bubbles over with associations – with ‘a Daubigny [...]’, for example, ‘which conveys the effect precisely.’ Liebermann, too, has a place here: ‘I am quite near Zweeloo, where, among others, Liebermann has been; and besides, there is an area here where you still find large, very old turf huts, which have not even a partition between the stable and the living room. I intend first of all to visit that spot one of these days’ (395/350).

A long letter written in October 1885 testifies to the fact that Liebermann had by now become a firmly established topic in the correspondence between the two brothers, although Vincent conveys the impression he had still never seen any of his paintings. ‘You wrote to me about Liebermann: his palette consists of slate-grey tones, principally running from brown to yellowish-grey. I have never seen anything of his, but now that I have seen the landscape here, I can understand perfectly how logically he was led to it. [...] There are Jules Dupré effects, to be sure, but in this autumn season it is exactly that – as you describe Liebermann’s palette. And if I do find what I am looking for [...] I shall certainly often do it in the same way, in that same chromatic gamut!’ (397/352).

A letter of November 1885, however, shows that the artist was indeed directly familiar with at least one of Liebermann’s works, albeit probably only in reproduction: ‘I must just tell you about a trip to Zweeloo, the village where Liebermann stayed for a long time and did studies for his painting at the last Salon, the one with the washerwomen. Imagine a trip across the heath at 5 o’clock in the

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Van Gogh is here clearly referring to Liebermann’s painting *Bleaching (Zweeloo)* (fig. 1).13 Liebermann, who had stayed in the village of Zweeloo from the beginning of August until the end of October 1882, wrote to his brother Felix: ‘I could almost believe that Ruysdael and Hobbema made their studies here. At all events their paintings bear the mark of this region and nothing has changed in the meantime. The houses have been standing here for the past 250 or 300 years. They live and cook in the same room, and this is also where the pigs, which every farmer slaughters every year, are smoked. You can’t get fresh meat here. Sometimes they fetch it for me from a place a good five hours away. The cowherd, the milkmaid, the farmhand and the farmer and his wife all sit around the kitchen table and eat from the same bowl, [...] like one big family. There is no poverty here. My landlord, who is a member of the local council, tells me that two men are on the parish. And so the people here are honest and right-minded.’14

Liebermann’s painting shows two washerwomen spreading out wet linen sheets on the lawn of an orchard.
for them to bleach in the sun. The fruit trees, silvery green in the matt early morning light of the summer’s day, guide the viewer’s gaze past the dull red front of a thatched farm house into the distance, where several women are hanging blue sheets over a wooden fence and talking as they work. A pen-and-ink drawing done by the artist for the catalogue of the 1885 Paris Salon shows a slightly different version of the scene (fig. 3). In the foreground a woman is shown kneeling next to a wooden tub, straightening out one of the sheets, while behind her another woman approaches with a heavy pail. Liebermann subsequently decided to create more distance in the painting, leaving the foreground empty and hence also conveying a sense of vacancy, alienation and solitariness, and making the figures seem less posed.  

As he writes, Van Gogh did in fact capture exactly the same scene in a watercolour (fig. 4). In his catalogue raisonné of the complete works on paper, published in 1928, J.-B. de la Faille dates the work to Van Gogh’s Hague period, while the new edition of 1992 suggests September 1882. We are convinced, however, that this is the ‘sketch’ Vincent mentions in his letter to Theo, and that it was made in Zweeloo in November 1885, and not before. The setting and activities fit Van Gogh’s description. The earlier dating, made on vague stylistic grounds, seems untenable now that the watercolour can be linked to the artist’s own statements. Now, one year after Liebermann, Van Gogh chooses the same orchard, but depicts it completely differently. Liebermann’s empty space, given rhythm by the white linen sheets receding into the distance, has now given way to a pattern of sheets running parallel to the picture plane, their brightness contrasting with the dull landscape. The sweeping, uncommonly elegant movements of the strong, sturdy washerwomen in Liebermann’s painting have yielded, in Van Gogh’s watercolour, to the stiff, stooped posture of the peasant woman, familiar to us from Millet’s Gleaners (1867, Paris, Louvre) and depicted in a relief-like side view reminiscent of Courbet’s Stonebreakers (1850–51, formerly Dresden, Gemäldegalerie, destroyed 1945). Although Van Gogh was probably familiar at least with the reproduction of Liebermann’s painting from the 1885 Salon catalogue, he makes no attempt to imitate the gestural breadth so characteristic of the German artist’s painting.

Weavers

Perhaps Van Gogh did not familiarise himself with Liebermann’s work until after he had grown tired of painting such multi-figure scenes as The public soup kitchen (P 1020 JH 733) and Turn-up street with diggers (fig. 7). All the same, we must still ask ourselves why this encounter was so fleeting, why Liebermann then disappeared from Van Gogh’s world. In Zweeloo, both artists had sought to represent the life of the peasant: Liebermann depicting the healthy solidarity of these simple people warding off poverty through their own uncomplicated, socially minded form of mutual assistance; Van Gogh depicting only the stark reality of ‘types [...], physiognomies that put one in mind of pigs or crows.’ Liebermann finds a model of humanity, Van Gogh a model of inhumanity: at once ‘them’ out there and those with whom he sought to identify himself, with whom he had to identify himself — an irreconcilable conflict indeed.

It was in Zweeloo, too, that Liebermann painted his picture of the weaver’s family (fig. 5), a painting which may possibly have inspired Van Gogh to make his own studies of solitary weavers. Van Gogh must have learnt – if only by hearsay – about Liebermann’s painting such a motif in this peasant village. Liebermann depicts the individual members of the weaver’s family going about their work; the movement of the weaver’s hand just after it has passed the shuttle between the warp yarns is captured with the meticulousness of an Adolph von Menzel; sitting at the spinning wheel next to the old gnarled loom is the weaver’s wife, turning the wheel powerfully as she spins the yarn; their daughter is winding the yarn in the background, where, on the table, frugal refreshments have been set out. Green
shutters picturesquely subdue the light. It is a scene that conveys the togetherness of solitary individuals, each working skilfully at his or her job, seemingly oblivious of the others. It is the depiction of the family as a working community and, as such, also a mirror of a much longed-for society, which would, through the strength of its own self-sufficiency and mutual sympathy, be able to achieve a modest degree of prosperity.

In none of his paintings of weavers (fig. 6) – all produced in Nuenen after 1884 – does Van Gogh depict a family. For a long time these works were interpreted all too superficially, either along psychological or humanitarian lines, as though the artist was concerned merely with rediscovering his own loneliness in his subjects, or with depicting them as cursed dehumanised victims of the machine. The fact that Van Gogh depicts an oak loom dating to 1730 testifies to a certain nostalgia for pre-industrial cottage weaving, which at the time was being replaced by factory production. Van Gogh quite literally paints the weavers within the frame of the loom – and within the framework of a morally based, historically all-embracing work ethos. Debora Silverman was certainly right in recognising a link with the puritanical myth of work as part of a religious pilgrimage. Out of this ethical myth, however, Van Gogh makes an aesthetic one: a desperate but thwarted religious mission is now transformed into a new way of making art. It is no coincidence that this aestheticising of monotonous ‘eternal’ labour in the service of God occurred at the same time as its secularisation. Once capitalism had turned the remuneration of labour into a coolly calculable production factor, and labour itself became a negotiable commodity like any other, the work ethos became a private matter. While this reification of labour effectively nullified the theological work ethos, it in effect acquired a new kind of validity in art. The motif of the patient hard-working carpenter Joseph of Nazareth now became an aesthetic ‘pathos formula’ that could be applied not only outside the religious context but outside the original social context as well. The weaver now became a signifier and a cliché, precisely because his way of working – and hence himself as a social type – were no more than ‘phased-out models’ in the reality of the outside world. Van Gogh’s solitary weavers are a metaphor of the artist’s work in the context of industrialisation. The meagre idyll conveyed by Liebermann’s weaver family stands for a timeless ethos that clearly anticipates republican utopianism. While Van Gogh’s painting follows a line of development that takes him from the urban life of The Hague via the weavers of Nuenen to the region’s peasants, Liebermann goes in the opposite direction, proceeding
from peasant handicraft to industry. His treatment of the theme of work underwent further development with *The flax makers* (1887, Berlin, Nationalgalerie) and *Weaving mill in Laren* (1887, private collection). Whilst Liebermann consistently aesthetics the industrial and social production process, Van Gogh’s paintings of peasant life culminate in his *Potato eaters*, a primitivistic, archaising caricature of human beings partaking of their evening meal. Although Van Gogh is here dealing with the same social themes and the same social types as Liebermann, and applies precisely the same aesthetic pathos formula, he oversteps the mark, as it were, confronting us with the ugliest possible depictions of our fellow men and women. In other words, he simultaneously stages both the ethical necessity of such a confrontation and its impossibility.

It was certainly not the aesthetic-social that Van Gogh had in mind when he wrote that he had painted his *Potato eaters* ‘in the colour of a very dusty potato, unpeeled of course’ [502/405], and that ‘the last thing [he] would want would be for people to admire or approve of it without knowing why’ [501/404].

Even when he first mentions Liebermann, Van Gogh contradicts himself: he would like to adopt something of Liebermann’s systematic treatment of colour and yet, he says, one really ought not to have a system at all. He admires Liebermann, but even this admiration is full of conflict. He values his aesthetic strategy and yet it frightens him. The question is: why?

**Van Gogh and the media of naturalism**

If we consider Van Gogh’s judgment rather than his artistic achievement, there is no doubt that he had a lesser command of the world of naturalist practice than Liebermann. The latter’s art-historical and classical education stood in sharp contrast to the humanitarian fantasies in which Van Gogh so eagerly indulged. The themes of social genre painting were a carbon copy of Van Gogh’s own experience of life. Added to this were the novels he avidly read. As early as the 1870s he had already made a habit of interpreting his own life of poverty against the background of such authors as Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot and Charles Dickens. Whereas at first he found confirmation of his evangelical zeal in George Eliot, he later placed the emphasis on the social aspect of her work and identified himself with Felix Holt, ‘the radical.’ He first took an interest in Dickens while working in Paris and London as an art dealer and turned to him again during his time as a lay preacher in the Borinage; he later became interested in the illustrations of Dickens’s books, above all in those by Fred Barnard for the Household Edition. The influences of Eliot and Dickens converge in *The Hague*, and it is probably against this background that Van Gogh’s interest in early illustrated magazines should be seen.22 It was during his time here, too, that Van Gogh worked his way through the oeuvre of Émile Zola and other French authors, such as Honoré de Balzac, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt and Alexandre Dumas, all of whom he revered as representatives of the naturalist tradition.23 In his art, Van Gogh now became less concerned with conveying the type of sentimental mood he had once admired in the genre paintings of Jozef Israëls, one of the leading artists of the Hague School, than with depicting multi-figure scenes of the kind encountered in the English illustrateds. Again and again, the works produced during Van Gogh’s Dutch period manifest tendencies towards naturalist figurative compositions, as in his *Women miners* (F 944, JH 255), the charcoal drawing *The public sofa kitchen or the study of the Potato grubbers* (F 1054, JH 572).

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21 Concerning the pre-conditions on which signs can be interpreted at all: and hence can become signs, see Charles S. Peirce, *Selected writings*, values in a universe of chance, ed. Philip P. Wiener, New York 1958, pp. 112-22.

22 Pickvance, op. cit. (note 6), pp. 20-41.

Whereas Liebermann observed the world of the peasants, the poverty-stricken and workers from the safe distance of the bourgeois gentleman, the pastor's son Van Gogh, although realising he would be unable to bridge the gap, nonetheless desperately sought contact with the other side. One of the main themes of the more recent debate on Van Gogh's Hague period has been the artist's concern with the rapid social changes that were taking place in the city at the time and his unexpected turn towards the archaic pre-industrial world of the peasant from September 1883 onwards. Some scholars have interpreted Van Gogh's retreat into the country as an escape from the present; others have emphasised his puritanical sympathy with working people, irrespective of their social standing but above all with the lowest, and his desire to be one of them. Some have stressed the distance between the bourgeois Van Gogh and the proletarian world he depicts, others have demonstrated how very much he considered his own work to be as humble as theirs.

By way of Van Gogh's large drawing of road workers in front of a Hague bakery (fig. 7), Griselda Pollock has shown how unskilled the artist still was at incorporating peasant workers into a scene depicting industrial urban development. The artist's remarks concerning his watercolour and gouache sketch The poor and money (F 970 JH 222) show, according to Pollock, that Van Gogh saw the city's destitute desperately spending their last pence on the lottery as 'they' and 'them' - in other words, from the viewpoint of the bourgeoisie. For her, this sketch represents a 'stark encounter between the bourgeois artist and the urban poor.'

Debora Silverman, on the other hand, refers to the continuity of Van Gogh's social commitment from the time of his first attempts at working as a lay preacher to the very end of his life. Starting out from John Bunyan's devotional work The pilgrim's progress, published in 1678, which she describes as a 'landmark in the development of English Protestant dissent' and which had inspired one of Van Gogh's sermons as early as 1874, Silverman interprets his work, and not least its technical aspect, as a pilgrimage of the simple working man. She compares the frame of the loom the artist uses for framing the solitary, somnambulistic weavers in his long series of oil sketches with the artist's drawing frame, a device used by the topographical painters of the 18th century and with which Van Gogh was familiar from Dürer's woodcut. Whilst Liebermann was able to sympathise with the weaver's family in Zweeloo (fig. 5) - those 'honest and right-minded' representatives of 'humanity' from time immemorial - only from a distance, the stretcher of Van Gogh's canvas for the Potato eaters had already become the loom and his work the fabric. On 30 April 1885 he wrote to Theo: 'I've held the threads of this fabric in my hands all winter long and searched for the definitive pattern - and although it is now a fabric of rough and course appearance, the threads have nonetheless been chosen with care and according to certain rules' [501/404].

Thus, while Liebermann even regards the peasants of Zweeloo as survivors of the 17th century, Van Gogh searches for a way of identifying himself with them. In the Potato eaters, we encounter both perspectives: the peasants as 'they' and 'them' and Van Gogh himself as a peasant. In the letter quoted above, he writes initially: 'The point is that I've tried to bring out the idea that these people eating potatoes by the light of their lamp have dug the earth with the self-same hands they are now putting into the dish, and it thus suggests manual labour - a meal honestly earned. I wanted to convey a picture of a way of life quite different from ours, from that of civilised people.' Then, however, only a few lines further on, the artist himself becomes one
of them: 'No, one must paint peasants as if one were one of them, as if one felt and thought as they do' [501/404].

We thus cannot but assume that Van Gogh identified himself with the peasants precisely because they were so different, so primitively innocent. In his numerous preliminary studies and preparatory portraits for the painting, the artist deliberately developed an unrealistic style.28 The caricature-like exaggeration of originally individual physiognomies, the enlarged depiction of stiff, gnarled toil-roughened hands, every movement of which becomes a bold, larger-than-life gesture, the perspectival inconsistencies and the sombre colouration are still considered grotesque by some commentators today.27 The outlandishness and coarseness of the persons depicted belies the comparatively conservative standards by which the artist himself judged his own work. At all times he remained faithful to a naturalist credo.28

It is in this contradiction that yet another ‘stark encounter’ manifests itself, not just of the pastor’s son with the world of the workers and peasants, but also of a misfit with the world of naturalism, with its paintings and novels, the myths and clichés to which he was helplessly exposed and against which he nevertheless sought to assert himself as an artist. Van Gogh tried to adapt, to become an illustrator and naturalist painter, but the gap could not be bridged. Initially, this gap was the hopeless distance between himself and his fellow artists, the lack of professionalism which he felt and simultaneously suppressed; later, it was his uncompromising insistence on being different, on a humane empathy that cannot simply be dismissed as sentimental humanitarianism, on a sympathy which was always and forever in conflict with the aesthetic detachment required of naturalist art – a sympathy which, no matter how much it expressed itself through the language of painting, sought, in the final analysis, to reach something that is beyond the scope of any language. And yet Van Gogh’s view of every landscape, every figure, was conditioned by his education and cultural background. Like a male Madame Bovary, he was at the mercy of the culture of his time: its exhibitions, its illustrations, its trite novels. However, it was precisely against this background of pathos and sentimentality, emotionality and suggestion, that Van Gogh was determined to fight: hidden behind all his ambitions, reasonings and reflections was not failure or inadequacy but rather the naiveté of a man who takes the world seriously, a man who does not feel compassion as an artist or as a man of letters but purely and simply as a human being. Until 1885, Van Gogh’s works often seem to be art brut expressions of realism. He is part and parcel of the system, and yet he constantly, even desperately, tries to be outside it, to incorporate his Otherness (which he senses but cannot really accept) into his work, and to transcend the clichés and models that confronted him everywhere, even in his own art.

Liebermann and Van Gogh

Liebermann’s interest in Van Gogh was likewise full of perhaps unexpected contradictions. It is not known when the artist first heard of Van Gogh. However, as the president of the Berlin Sezession, he was certainly ultimately responsible for the fact that Van Gogh’s paintings were shown there almost continually from 1902 onwards. Corinth recalled in 1910 that the society’s secretary, Walter Leistikow, and the art dealer Paul Cassirer – there is no mention of Liebermann – had exhibited ‘all kinds of Frenchmen’ at the Sezession shows, including ‘[...] a Dutchman, about whom nobody had ever heard a single word: Van Gogh. [...] Van


26 Hulsker, op. cit. (note 16), pp. 127-75.


Gogh's paintings astonished the whole of Berlin at first, and in such a way that they reaped nothing but ironic laughter and a shrugging of shoulders. But the Sezession continued to show new works by this Dutchman, and today Van Gogh counts among the best and the most expensive. Twenty-five works by Van Gogh had, in fact, already been displayed at the third Sezession exhibition in May 1901, and we may safely assume that Liebermann shared the group's interest in the Dutch artist. As Walter Feilchenfeldt has shown, Cassirer succeeded in convincing a great many Berlin collectors who patronised the Sezession, some of whom were either Liebermann's relatives or close friends, to buy Van Gogh's works. At that time, almost all the collections of more recent French art in Berlin belonged to members of the Jewish upper middle class. They purchased impressionist pictures ranging from Manet to Liebermann, as well work of other painters exhibiting at the Sezession. A Van Gogh would have fitted into their collections — and much more readily than works of the German Expressionists or those of the more recent French avant-garde, in other words, paintings manifesting those tendencies that the gallery owner Herwarth Walden would later promote.

In January 1907 Liebermann himself finally bought a work by Van Gogh — one of his final ones — for his own private collection (fig. 8). The 'wheat wave' (Paul Celan) undulating beyond the narrow unploughed ridge beneath a deep blue sky is one of the most painterly studies ever to have come from Van Gogh's hand.

The German painter was not, however, entirely convinced by his purchase, acknowledging the Dutch painter's work only with some reservation. Much later, in 1931, when Ludwig Justi sought to acquire Van Gogh's Daubigny's garden (fig. 9) for the Nationalgalerie, Liebermann — by then the éminence grise of the Berlin art scene — spoke out vehemently against the acquisition, and in the magazine Kunst und Künstler poured scorn on Justi, the director of the Nationalgalerie — and not merely on account of the 250,000 Reichsmark the museum was prepared to pay. Little did Liebermann know that his protest antici-

fig. 8
Vincent van Gogh, Wheatfield with cornflowers (F 808 JH 2118), 1890, private collection

ated the ‘fervent objections’ of the Munich branch of the Reichsverband Bildender Künstler, which would likewise have preferred to see the money spent on the works of impoverished German artists.32 The painting was purchased all the same. When the Nazis began to purge Germany’s museums of their so-called ‘degenerate art,’ the painting was confiscated (30 October 1937). In 1940 it was appropriated by Hermann Göring, who transferred the sum of 150,000 Reichsmark to the Nationalgalerie for the painting, its insurance value having been assessed in that same year at 240,000.33 The painting later came into the hands of a private collector in New York before finally being acquired by the Hiroshima Museum of Art.34

Van Gogh’s reputation had been firmly established in Germany since the beginning of the century, thanks not least to the writings of Julius Meier-Graefe, Emil Heibutz, Fritz von Ostini, Curt Glaser, Karl Scheffler and Wilhelm Hauseinstein, among others.35 Nonetheless, in 1931 Liebermann had little esteem not only for the curator Ludwig Justi, but also put strict limits on his admiration of the artist: ‘Van Gogh was a genius whose demonic passion far outstripped his ability, thus preventing him from producing any work that was perfect in itself. It is precisely perfection, the perfect and hence exemplary work, which makes all the difference, both for the public and for the artist himself. Van Gogh’s passionate striving cannot be esteemed too highly; but it is not what is striven for, but what is achieved, not what is intended, but what is accomplished that affords the art-seeking and art-loving viewer lasting enjoyment [...]’.36

Without a doubt, Liebermann and Van Gogh remained strangers. Both of them knew about, and even took an initial interest in each other’s work, and yet they went to great pains to avoid each other thereafter.


fig. 1
Glashaven, where the Oldenzeel gallery was situated.
Rotterdam, Gemeentearchief
In 1903 three exhibitions of work by Vincent van Gogh from his Dutch years were organised by the Oldenzeel gallery in Rotterdam. In January, May and November of that year the public were able to view a collection of paintings and drawings that had never before been on public display. These exhibitions caused quite a stir when it emerged that even the Van Gogh family had not been aware of the existence of this group of works. Where had the collection come from? Why had no one in the family circle known anything about it? The exhibitions prompted the Van Gogh family to launch an inquiry to establish the rightful owner of the pieces. The investigation concluded that the works must have come from the studio that Van Gogh had left behind in Nuenen.

More than 20 years later Benno Stokvis published his Nasporingen omtrent Vincent van Gogh in Brabant, in which he endeavoured to clarify the history of Van Gogh’s Nuenen studio. His sources included interviews with persons who had been directly involved. Two questions, however, remain yet unanswered: first, which works had been displayed at the Oldenzeel exhibitions; and, second, could these works actually be traced back to the Nuenen studio? J.-B. de la Faille was the first Van Gogh specialist to consider these exhibitions in detail. Illustrations in the journal Moderne Kunstwerken from 1903 allowed him to identify several works that had been in the January show in his oeuvre catalogues of 1928 and 1939. New information gathered from further study was subsequently incorporated into his posthumously published catalogue, The works of Vincent van Gogh: his paintings and drawings (1970). Still, to date no systematic research has been conducted regarding the works displayed at the exhibitions.

Using the sources currently available, the present article will endeavour to reconstruct the Oldenzeel exhibitions and to establish the connection, if any, with Van Gogh’s Nuenen studio. Although this reconstruction is plainly incomplete in some respects, the interim results of the study seem sufficiently important to warrant publication.

Oldenzeel: art dealers in Rotterdam

In 1855 Christiaan Sander Johan Vlaanderen entered into partnership with the Rotterdam bookseller Hendrik van Gogh (1814-1877), one of Vincent’s uncles and owner of a shop on Steiger. Three years later Hendrik transferred full ownership of the business to Oldenzeel. In 1874 the latter decided to switch from the book to the art trade. His business was based on Zuidblaak, first at number 16, later at number 84. In late 1888 Oldenzeel moved to handsome premises at 74 Leuvehaven. Here, in the spring and autumn of 1892, he held two shows of Van Gogh’s work, chosen from the collection administered by Jo van Gogh-Bonger (1862-1925) on behalf of her minor son Vincent Willem (1890-1978). These exhibitions made Oldenzeel the first dealer in Rotterdam to introduce art lovers to works from Van Gogh’s Dutch and French periods.

The firm remained at this address for more than ten years, until 1899, when Margareta Wilhelmina Oldenzeel-Schot (1857-1912), who had assumed control of the busi-
ness on the death of her husband in December 1896, was forced to move out. She found new premises on the Glashaven, which were refitted by the Rotterdam architect J.C. Meijers (fig. 1). In late February 1899 the gallery opened with an exhibition of paintings, drawings and graphic work by contemporary, mainly Dutch, artists. The press was enthusiastic about the new space. The Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad wrote on 27 February: ‘Today Mrs Oldenzeel opened a new art gallery at the establishment redesigned for her at no. 20 Glashaven [...]’. In her new establishment Mrs Oldenzeel disposes of two, not excessively large galleries with good, even light. ‘The rear gallery is lit from above.’ According to the reviewer in the Arnhemse Courant of 4 March, the work was displayed to good effect against sober green wallpaper. Albert Plasschaert (1874-1944), who also visited the exhibition, noticed the floor of the galleries, which was of pine painted a bluish, light green. Although Mrs Oldenzeel regularly introduced visitors to the work of young artists (Charles Gruppe, Willy Suyter, Ferdinand Hart Nibbrig), she also routinely displayed pictures by painters of the Hague School. In 1903 the gallery had a conspicuously full programme, comprising no less than nine separate shows, including the three of Van Gogh’s works.

In 1904 Oldenzeel held another Van Gogh show, from 10 November to 15 December. Once again, previously unknown pieces from the artist’s Dutch period were on display, alongside unsold work from the 1903 shows. Among the pictures not for sale were some ten paintings from Van Gogh’s French period, loaned by private collectors. De la Faille was the first to identify the works at this exhibition. The results of his research were published in his 1970 catalogue of Van Gogh’s oeuvre. For this reason the present article does not include a discussion of the 1904 show.

Between 1892 and 1906 the gallery held eight exhibitions entirely dedicated to the work of Van Gogh. In May 1907 Mrs Oldenzeel sold the business and moved to Apeldoorn. Her successor, J.B. Harmeyer, did not organise any further Van Gogh shows.

No archives of the Oldenzeel firm appear to have survived. In order to reconstruct the 1903 exhibitions, therefore, I was compelled to rely on reviews published in national and regional newspapers and journals of the period, which regularly supplied relevant information. The works themselves could also provide evidence of an ‘Oldenzeel’ connection, as pieces handled by the firm often have the following characteristics: the canvas or paper has been attached to panel or card (Oldenzeel took this measure in order to conserve works that had suffered the effects of long-term storage); a thin red strip of paper is affixed to the edges of the works; and there is an Oldenzeel label on the back (fig. 2).

The studio in Nuenen

The history of Van Gogh’s ‘abandoned studio’ is no longer entirely unknown. In 1904/05 Jo Cohen Gosschalk-Bonger12 instructed lawyers to conduct an investigation into the affair. 1926 saw the publication of the Stokvis book, containing recollections by the relevant individuals. However, information concerning ownership and biographical data still remained incomplete or lacking. I have endeavoured to fill these hiatuses in order to obtain a clearer picture of what actually happened to the studio and its contents.

In late November 1885 Van Gogh decided to move to Antwerp. Here he hoped he would be able to work in peace, free of the sorts of pressures he had experienced in Nuenen, where pastor Andreas Pauwels13 had made it virtually impossible for him to find models. Although his in-

6 Although no picture of the Oldenzeel premises around 1900 was found in the photograph collection of the Gemeentearchief in Rotterdam, it did contain several views of the Glashaven in this period.

7 Pencil note by Plasschaert in the exhibition catalogue (The Hague, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie [RKD]).

8 See J.-B. de la Faille, The works of Vincent van Gogh: his paintings and drawings, Amsterdam 1970. The Dutch works at the exhibition (nos. 1-61) are included in the concordance to this article.

9 Many years later the damage caused during storage was still sometimes apparent. One example of this is the painting Potato planting (F 41 JH 513); the illustration in exhib. cat. Van Gogh in Brabant, ’s-Hertogenbosch (Noordbrabants Museum) 1987-88, no. 24, clearly shows the consequences of the canvas having been folded for many years.

intention was to spend several months in Antwerp and then to return to Nuenen, things turned out differently: in February 1886 the artist moved to Paris instead of returning to Brabant.

Before leaving for Antwerp Van Gogh had lived and worked in the house of sexton Johannes Leonardus Schafrat and his wife Adriana Schafrat-van Eerd. As Adriana Schafrat informed Stokvis, Eerel (1853-1930), Van Gogh had intended to stay away for just a few weeks, explained why he left everything behind, including his stock of work and household effects. In March 1886 Vincent's mother, Anna Cornelia Carbentus, and his sister Willemina (Wil) Jacobsa (1862-1941) moved to Breda. The work from Van Gogh's studio was packed into crates and deposited with a Breda carpenter called Schrauwen. This must have been Adrianus Schrauwen (1854-1920), who lived at 87 Ginnekenstraat. When Anna Cornelia and Wil then moved to Leiden in November 1889, the crates were left behind and soon forgotten. In late June 1888 Van Gogh had actually written to his sister from Arles, asking her if she could salvage something of his 'rommel' ('junk'), which, 'according to Theo, was still somewhere in an attic in Breda' [835/W4]. It is not known if Wil responded to this request, for Van Gogh does not mention the matter again in his subsequent letters.

When, after years in obscurity, Oldenzeel began to exhibit the unknown collection of work in 1903, Jo took immediate action. She asserted that the pieces belonged to her son Vincent, as he was the sole heir of her deceased first husband, Theo van Gogh. She questioned Vincent's mother about the matter, but the old lady could no longer remember the events precisely. The first person who could shed any light on the matter was Cornelia ('Kee') Adriana Vos-Stricker (1846-1918), one of Vincent and Theo's cousins. In early June 1905 she wrote to Jo that her mother, Willemina Catharina Gerardina Stricker-Carbentus (1816-1904), Van Gogh's mother's sister, remembered the crates having been deposited with a carpenter.

Although Schrauwen was then eventually traced, Jo regarded the information he provided as suspect. It was at this point that she instructed J.M. Jolles, a lawyer with practices in Amsterdam and Bussum, to investigate the matter further. Jolles in turn requested the assistance of a Breda-based colleague, F.E. Pels Rycken.

Correspondence between the lawyers reveals that Schrauwen had made questionable statements regarding the number and nature of the items that had been deposited.
ed with him. He spoke of a 'mess of ironwork, paper, etc., including possibly several drawings,' which he had sold in 1902 to a man he called Goeverneur (= Couvreur).21 However, it proved impossible to obtain a clear picture of these transactions, as Schrauwen's memory often failed him. Pels Rycken and Schrauwen eventually agreed that the latter would pay the Van Gogh family what he had received for the sale of the works. Schrauwen claimed this entailed only eight paintings, sold for a total of 128 guilders, as he had allowed Johannis Cornelis Couvreur to remove the items in the attic for nothing. However, when the moment arrived to pay up, Schrauwen's son, Adrianus Wilhelmus 1871-1943, declared that at least for the time being he was in no position to honour his commitment.22 In early June 1905 Jolles informed Johan Cohen Gosschalk that Schrauwen Jr would receive regular reminders to pay the agreed sum. Reading between the lines, however, it is evident that he was far from confident that the latter would meet his obligations.23

When the lawyer made inquiries of the following owner, J.C. Couvreur, he was informed that - according to Couvreur's own records - the furniture dealer had purchased more than 40 works, including watercolours, for one guilder apiece, on 14 August 1902.24 Years later, however, Couvreur told Stokvis a very different story: he claimed that, together with his brother, Johannes Marinus, he had acquired 60 stretched paintings, 150 loose canvases, 80 pen drawings and 100 to 200 crayon drawings.25 These works then came into the possession of a certain Kees Mouwen (1855-1915/14),26 who ran a gala clothing and military uniform shop at 22 Lange Brugstraat in Breda (fig. 3). Mouwen wished to dispose of his collection of Van Goghs. Since there were no sales opportunities in Breda, he turned to Oldenzeel in Rotterdam. The art critic Hendrikus Petrus Bremmer (1871-1936) was probably responsible for making the contact, as can be inferred from a note by Bremmer's wife: 'In 1903 a resident of Breda came to B. to ask his advice as to how he could sell off a large collection of paintings by Van Gogh, which he had bought for a trifle when, many years ago, these had been peddled around that city, and which he had then put in his attic. B. advised him to exhibit them for sale at the Oldenzeel gallery in Rotterdam. That exhibition gave B. a further opportunity to point out Van Gogh's art to his pupils.'27 It thus came about that Oldenzeel was the first art dealer to display these previously unknown works.

In 1904 Mouwen put a portion of the unsold work up for auction at Frederik Muller in Amsterdam. The sale, which took place on 5 May, proved a great disappointment for him: of the 41 works included only 11 were sold; the total net profit was a mere 450 guilders.28 The lawyer Jolles

21 Although Schrauwen had never been the lawful owner of the works, he had acted as such when he began to sell them. 'Goeverneur' must be a distortion of Couvreur. The brothers Johannis Cornelis (1876-1961) and Johannes Marinus (1882-1961) Couvreur were dealers in old furniture in Breda; see Stokvis, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 4-8.

22 As well as a carpenter, Schrauwen Jr was also a purveyor of spirits, with premises at 24 St Janstraat, Breda. He had taken over the company from his father in 1905.

23 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, F.E. Pels Rycken to J.M. Jolles, 14 April 1900, b 1560 V/1962


25 Ibid., J.M. Jolles to F.E. Pels Rycken, 1 September 1904, b 1560 V/1962.


27 According to the death certificate, Cornelis Hendrikus Wilhemus Mouwen was found dead in Ophoven on 10 January 1914 (Kroko, Belgium, Gemeentearchief). However, an obituary notice drawn up by his daughter gives the date of death as 28 November 1913 (The Hague, Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie [CBG]).
commented on the sale: ‘He had to withdraw everything, apart from 11 pieces. Net proceeds 450 guilders. Everything belonged to Kees Mouwen, Willem gets percentages.’

This text reveals that Mouwen was not acting on his own; in fact, he was working hand in glove with the career soldier Willem van Bakel (1866-?), who had settled in Breda in 1902 after serving in the Dutch East Indies from 1896-1901. Van Bakel had been given a post at the Koninklijke Militaire Academie (Royal Military Academy) for the training of cadets; on 2 March 1904 he received an honourable discharge at his own request. A month later he left again for the Dutch East Indies, after which point he disappeared from sight. He may have returned to the Netherlands on leave in 1919.

In all probability, Van Bakel and Mouwen knew each other through their families. From the age of two, Willem van Bakel had resided in the house of his uncle Petrus Wilhelmus Egers (1822-1896), a Utrecht broker, and his aunt Engelina van der Putten (1822-1879), a sister of his mother, Johanna van der Putten (1834-1909). Following Engelina’s death in 1879, Egers remarried a year later. His new wife was Louise de Penasse (1840-1911), an aunt of Kees Mouwen’s wife, Johanna Ots (1877-1905).

It is difficult to determine precisely in what way Van Bakel and Mouwen collaborated. Jolles’s letter of 6 June 1905, quoted above, mentions ‘percentages’ of the auction proceeds going to Van Bakel, which appears to suggest a role as an intermediary. However, other sources explicitly describe Van Bakel as owner, at least of some works. Van Bakel himself acted as such in a letter to his sister H.D. Pierson of Scheveningen, dated 15 January 1904, in which he talked of ‘my Van Gogh collection.’ If we assume that Van Bakel was indeed an owner – in my opinion the most likely supposition – the question remains of whether there was a single collection owned by two individuals or two collections with different provenances.

The latter possibility is also suggested in a letter written by Louisa Daeter-Egers (1884-1971), daughter of Van Bakel’s uncle Petrus Wilhelmus Egers and his second wife Louise de Penasse. In 1955, i.e. 50 years after the event, she set down the following story concerning the provenance of the Van Bakel works. She claimed that her father had owned a crate containing at least 80 Van Gogh works; in the days following his death (Oirschot, 1 May 1896), she alleged, his foster son took possession of the crate, which he then had taken to Breda. Here Daeter’s story ends. In 1965 Jolles had heard a similar tale from Louise Egers-De Penasse, although he never managed to clarify the true facts of the case. Remarkably, he makes no mention of an unlawful appropriation of works by Van Bakel. Assuming there is a foundation of truth to the story, some of the works exhibited for sale at the Oldenzeel gallery may not have come from Schrauwen and Couvreur, and thus not have originated in Van Gogh’s abandoned studio.

Daeter’s story implies that some 80 works by Van Gogh had come into Eger’s hands before 1 May 1896, the date of his death. The existence of such a substantial collection of unknown Dutch works, alongside the contents of the Nuenen studio and the pieces owned by the Van Gogh family, is extremely problematic. Doubts are reinforced by the total lack of evidence as to how these pictures came into the possession of the Utrecht broker in the first place.

Given the current state of research, the existence of a separate collection of works deriving from the Egers family does not seem very likely.


29 There is an annotated catalogue in the collection of the RKD, The Hague (Lugt no 62240). The works at the auction are included in the concordance to this article.

30 See note 24.

31 His date of death could not be discovered.

32 An advertisement of 23 April 1919 (The Hague, CBG) announces that the administrator of the Tandjong Garboos company, a certain Willem van Bakel, had gone to Europe on leave. Could this be ‘our’ Willem van Bakel?

33 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, T. van Iserlohn to Jo Cohen Gosschalk-Bonger, 13 February 1903, b 1556 V/1962. This statement concerning ownership was corroborated by Hermanus Gisbertus Tersteeg (1845-1927), director of The Hague branch of the Gisbol galleries on a letter to Jo of 28 February 1903 (Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, b 4146 V/1964).

34 The letter is incorrectly dated 13 January 1903; photograph of the letter in The Hague, RKD (added to the photo of SP 1667 H 629).

35 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, Vincent van Gogh Foundation, L. Daeter-Egers to V.W van Gogh, 3 March 1953 (unnumbered). Louis van Tilborgh (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam) was kind enough to draw my attention to the existence of this letter.

36 See note 24.

37 Inquiries made of the Daeter family about letters regarding these questions have produced no results. P. Daeter of Maassluis was kind enough to establish contact with the family.
The Oldenzeel exhibition of
January-February 1903

On Saturday, 5 January 1903 (fig. 4) an exhibition of
hitherto unknown work by Vincent van Gogh was opened
in the rear gallery of Oldenzeel's premises (Nieuwe
Rotterdamsche Courant, 5 January). Many of the pieces
were apparently the property of Willem van Bakel.38
According to the reviewer D.B. (= Julius de Boer), writing
in the Kroniek of 17 January, around 40 works were on
display. On 20 January the Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad reported
that the exhibition comprised 45 pieces. Although lack of
an exhibition list or catalogue makes it impossible to deter-
mine the precise number of works in the show, there must
have been around 50 in total.

For 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day for more than a
month, visitors could view paintings and drawings from
Van Gogh’s Dutch period, ranging from still lifes and interi-
ors with weavers to portrait heads and landscapes. In the
Kroniek of 7 February the critic Albert Plasschaert noted
that there were many ‘surprises,’ meaning that no one
should think they already knew Van Gogh’s work.
Plasschaert saw a correspondence between Van Gogh and
Millet, for both artists were greatly interested in depicting
the working man or woman, and the toiling labourer. But
there were also differences: Millet’s work emanated a ‘clas-
sic calm’ while Van Gogh’s manifested ‘drama’ and ‘turbu-
lence.’

R. Jacobsen’s review in the journal Onze Kunst dis-
cussed various works at length. Jacobsen also considered
Van Gogh’s technique, which, he wrote, varied ‘from admira-
ble skill to childlike ineptitude.’ He illustrated his
opinions by comparing ‘Stilleven van kool en klompen’
(Still life with cabbage and clogs, F 1 JH 81) and
‘Visscherskarikaturen’ (Caricatures of fishermen, F 5 JH 188
and F 6 JH 189). At the end of his review, however,
Jacobsen tempered his criticism somewhat, declaring that
although a work might seem clumsy, this was a deliberate
choice on Van Gogh’s part, with the artist endeavouring to
render the characteristic aspect of an action, which some-
times produced a caricature-style effect.39

Around 20 January, when the exhibition had been
open for more than two weeks, the collection was re-hung,
resulting in an adjustment to the numbering in some in-
stances (Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant, 25 January).40

In several discussions of the exhibition reviewers
mentioned the prices Oldenzeel was asking for the works.
‘The grapes are sour for gentlemen art buffs! Now they
have gradually started to realise that purchasing a work by
Vincent van Gogh would not be such a poor investment, the
owners are asking prices, prices!’ (Nieuwe Rotterdamsche
Courant, 11 January). Although no sums were actually given,
an indication of the prices can be found in a recent pub-
ication on the Gerlach Ribbius Peletier collection.41 In
1903 and 1904 Ribbius Peletier bought seven paintings at
the Oldenzeel gallery from Van Gogh’s Hague and Nuenen
periods. The prices the collector noted in his account book
range from 500 guilders for the head of a peasant woman to
700 for landscapes. A decided anomaly was ‘Zeetje’
(Seascape at Scheveningen, F 4 JH 187), for which he paid
2,500 guilders.42

When the exhibition closed on 5 February, 17 works
had been sold.43

38 Tensteeg (see note 33). Tensteeg had seen several
drawings at the exhibition that his company had framed
for Van Bakel.

39 R. Jacobsen, ‘Kunstzaal Oldenzeel. Vincent van Gogh,
maand januari,’ Onze Kunst (1903), 1, pp. 114–16.

40 The numbers given in the lists below have been de-
lined from these reviews.

41 Louis van Tilborgh and Marije Vellekoop, ‘Van Gogh
Reconstruction of the exhibition held from
3 January to 5 February 1903  See pp 113-14.

The exhibition held in May 1903
In May 1905 Oldenzeel organised another, smaller, presentation of Van Gogh works in the front gallery of her premises. Alongside the nine paintings and a single drawing she also exhibited works by other artists, such as Paul Gabriel, Willem Boelofs, Theo van Hoytema and Willem Tholen.

B.J. Jacobsen devoted several columns in Onze Kunst to the exhibition, whose works were drawn, for the second time that year, from Oldenzeel’s ‘secret store room’. Jacobsen was particularly struck by the landscapes, which he described as ‘specimens of sensitive lyrical landscape art.’ The reviewer in the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant of 31 May was also full of praise for the works on display.

Although no list of the works presented has been preserved, these reviews have made it possible to identify most of the works.

Reconstruction of the exhibition held in
May 1903  See p 114.

The exhibition held in November- December 1903
In late 1905 Oldenzeel held the third, and largest, exhibition of work from Van Gogh’s Dutch period. From 1 November visitors could view around a 100 pieces; the drawings were displayed in the front gallery, while the rear was reserved for the paintings. Having been prolonged, the exhibition finally closed on 15 December.

The exhibition received a great deal of attention in the national press. Articles in the Wereldkroniek by N.H. Wolf on 7, 14 and 21 November played a major role in promoting the show. Wolf even claimed that the exhibition might be the event of the year, declaring that the time had come for Van Gogh’s art to sell, and also for interest to be shown from abroad. The critic’s predictions proved correct, as pictures were sold from the very outset. He described the new owner of a still life with ‘blue porcelain pot’ (probably F 52 JH 555) as a ‘happy’ man. In his final review, Wolf was able to report that the exhibition was continuing successfully; many art lovers having seized the opportunity to view Van Gogh’s work in Rotterdam. The Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant reviewer also offered his opinion of the show in three articles (8, 15 and 22 November), declaring that the visitor could now see the rest of the ‘mysterious’ Breda collection, for which the two galleries were actually too small.

It would be interesting to know how Oldenzeel arranged the works in the two rooms. Were they hung according to theme, period or size? Unfortunately, we do not know. The only person to touch upon this subject was the critic for the Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (22 November), who mentions three paintings of considerable size: ‘Watermill’ (no. 48, F 125 JH 525), ‘Potato planters’ (no. 52, F 41 JH 513) and ‘Shepherd’ (no. 45, F 42 JH 517), all hung together. He felt the ‘Shepherd’ was painted very woodenly in comparison with the other two works.

The paintings were displayed in black frames (Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad, 16 November). One painting still fitted with its exhibition frame is Avenue of poplars in Nuenen (F 45 JH 999), which was purchased in 1905 for the permanent collection of the Museum Boymans in Rotterdam. It is remarkable, but in fact this simple frame shows the work to its best advantage, allowing viewers to focus all their attention on the painting itself.

Wolf’s enthusiasm for Van Gogh’s work was shared by Albert Plasschaert, although the latter was also irritated that interest in the artist only now seemed to be developing.

42 Oldenzeel had originally set the price at 5,000 guilders, but Ribbis Peletier thought this was out of line with those asked for the other works, see Van Tilborgh and Vellekoop, op cit (note 41), p. 31.

43 Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum. Vincent van Gogh Foundation, H.P. Bremmer to Jo Cohen Gosschalk-Bonger, before 1 April 1903, b 1557 V/1962. Bremmer also mentions that two paintings at the exhibition came from ‘Versteeg’ (i.e. Tersteeg). According to De la Faille, Tersteeg owned F 910a (since 1882) and F 397 (French period), but this begs the question of whether Bremmer’s assertion was correct. For the exhibition’s closing date see Van Tilborgh and Vellekoop, op. cit. (note 41), p. 30, note 22.

44 The exhibition’s opening and closing dates could not be ascertained. However, it is likely that the show was held during the second half of May (see Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant, 31 May 1903).

45 See Onze Kunst (1903), II, p 60.

46 Announced in Algemeen Handelsblad, 28 November.

47 The same series of articles was published in the Zondagsblad v/h Dagblad v. Zuid-Holland en ‘s-Gravenhage on 8, 15 and 22 November.
He felt this was merely an 'affected' enthusiasm, stirred up by 'a teacher' who was leading the 'herds,' as people did not truly appreciate Van Gogh's art. Plasschaert employed terms such as 'grand' and 'extraordinarily real' to characterise the collection, claiming that few artists could evoke such feelings through their art.

Alongside discussions in newspapers and periodicals, an extremely important document, published here for the first time, provided a source for reconstructing the exhibition: Oldenzeel's own record of the works on display, which gives their title and supplies them with a number. The Van Gogh Museum acquired this 'catalogue' from the estate of Albert Plasschaert (figs. 5a, b and c). The list records 64 paintings and 36 drawings and watercolours. It also bears annotations by Plasschaert, who made notes to several catalogue numbers and a sketch near one entry during a visit to the exhibition. These aides memoire have proved extremely valuable, making it possible in more than one instance to identify works with a reasonable degree of certainty.

Reconstruction of the exhibition held from 1 November to 13 December 1903

48 The reference is to the influential H.P. Bremmer, who gave courses in art history. See Hildelines Balk, 'De freule, de professor, de koopman en zijn vrouw: het publiek van H.P. Bremmer,' Jong Holland 9 (1993), no. 2, pp. 4-24

49 See Onze Kunst (1903), II, pp.173-75

Reconstruction of the exhibition held from 3 January to 5 February 1903

No. 1
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources
Comments
No. 2, 37
Faille 1928/1970 - / 48a
Op de Coul 48a
Sources1 AH 5 January:
NRC 11 January; OK, I, p. 115
Comments In AH as no. 37
No. 3, 38
Faille 1928/1970 39 / 39
Op de Coul 39
Sources AH 5 January;
NRC 11 January; Kr 17 January, p. 20 and 7 February, p. 46; RN 20 January, OK, I, p. 115; MK, no. 4, item 26 (with reproduction)
Comments In AH as no. 38
No. 4
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 144
Sources NRC 25 January
Comments See Van Tilborgh and Vellekoop, op. cit. (note 41), p. 36
No. 5
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 25
Sources NRC 25 January
Comments Painting entitled Head: 'weight of dark colours'

No. 6
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources NRC 25 January
Comments Painting entitled Head: 'weight of dark colours'
No. 7
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 8
Faille 1928/1970 - / 58
Op de Coul 58
Sources OK, I, p. 116
Comments -
No. 9
Faille 1928/1970 197 / 197
Op de Coul 197
Sources NRC 11 January and 25 January; VA 16 January; RN 20 January, OK, I, p. 115; MK, no. 4, item 29 (with reproduction)
Comments -
No. 10
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 197
Sources -
Comments -
No. 11, 28
Faille 1928/1970 1 / 1
Op de Coul
Sources AH 5 January; NRC 11 January; OK, I, p. 115; MK, no. 4, item 27 (with reproduction)
Comments In AH as no. 28
No. 12[a]
Faille 1928/1970 - / 62
Op de Coul 62
Sources NRC 25 January
Comments In NRC as no. 12
No. 12[b]
Faille 1928/1970 - / 943
Op de Coul 943
Sources AH 5 January, Kr 7 February, p. 46; OK, I, pp. 115-16
Comments In AH as no. 12
No. 13
Faille 1928/1970 - / 19
Op de Coul 56
Sources OK, I, p. 115
Comments Identification according to Van Tilborgh and Vellekoop, op. cit. (note 10), p. 52, note 11. Incorrect identification in De la Faille 1970
No. 14
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 15
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 16
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 17, 18, 34
Faille 1928/1970 4 / 2
Op de Coul 4
Sources AH 5 January;
NRC 11 January and 25 January; Kr 17 January, p. 19 and 7 February, p. 46; RN 20 January, OK, I, p. 116; MK, no. 4, item 31
Comments In AH as no. 34; in OK as no. 18
No. 18, 17
Faille 1928/1970 - / 4
Op de Coul 2
Sources NRC 11 January;
RN 20 January, OK, I, p. 116; MK, no. 4, item 30 (with reproduction)
Comments In OK as no. 17
No. 19
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 20
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 21
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 22
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 23
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 24, 35
Faille 1928/1970 37 / 37
Op de Coul 37
Sources AH 5 January, Kr 17 January, p. 20 and 7 February, p. 46; RN 20 January; MK, no. 4, item 32 (with reproduction)
Comments In AH as no. 35
No. 25
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 26
Faille 1928/1970 184 / 184
Op de Coul 184
Sources NRC 11 January;
RN 20 January, OK, I, p. 115; MK, no. 4, item 28 (with reproduction)
Comments -
No. 27
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 28, 11
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 1
Sources AH 5 January
Comments In AH as no. 11
No. 29
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources AH 5 January
Comments In AH as no. 29
No. 30
Faille 1928/1970 98 / 98
Op de Coul 98
Sources OK, I, p. 115;
MK, no. 4, item 25 (with reproduction)
Comments In AH as no. 30
No. 31
Faille 1928/1970 - / 1087
Op de Coul 1087
Sources RN 20 January
Comments -
No. 32
Faille 1928/1970 -
Op de Coul
Sources -
Comments -
No. 33
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources AH 5 January
Comments Painting entitled Head of a woman: 'delicious green of the cap'
No. 34, 17, 18
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 17
Sources AH 5 January
Comments In AH as nos. 17 and 18
No. 35, 24
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 24
Sources AH 5 January
Comments In AH as no. 24
No. 36
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources AH 5 January
Comments In AH as no. 24
No. 37, 2
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 2
Sources AH 5 January
Comments In AH as no. 2
No. 38, 3
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul
Sources AH 5 January
Comments In AH as no. 3

* Journals and newspapers consulted: Algemeen Handelsblad (AH); Boon's geïllustreerd magazijn; De Controleur; Dagblad van Zuid-Holland en 's Gravenhage (DZ-H); Dietsche Warande; Eigen Haard; Elsevier's geïllustreerd Maandschrift; de Gids; Haagse Courant; De Kromek (Kr); De Maasbode; Moderne Kunstwerken (MK); De Nederlandsche Spectator; De nieuwe Gids; Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (NRC); Nieuws van den Dag; Onze Kunst (OK); Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad (RN); Rotterdamsche Courant; De Telegraaf; Tijdschrift voor Kunst & Letteren; Het Vaderland (Va); Weekblad de Amsterdammer; Wereldkroniek (Wk)

51 All sources date from 1903.
Reconstruction of the exhibition held in May 1903

Faille 1970 - Op de Coul 8a Sources NRC 31 May Comments Painting: ‘a woodland view’

Faille 1970 40 Op de Coul 40 Sources NRC 31 May, OK, II, p. 60 Comments -

Faille 1970 55 Op de Coul 55 Sources OK II, p. 60 Comments -

Faille 1970 - Op de Coul 72 or 73 Sources NRC 31 May, OK, II, p. 60 Comments Painting: ‘a couple of masterly done peasant women, heads grandiose in (their) ugliness’

As yet unidentified works

Sources NRC 31 May Comments A couple of painted sketches: ‘Salpêtrière head of a woman’

Sources OK II, p. 60 Comments Paintings: a couple of masterly done peasant women, heads grandiose in (their) ugliness’

Reconstruction of the exhibition held from 1 November to 13 December 1903

Paintings

No. 1 Title Peasant woman (interior at eventide)
Faille 1928/1970 - Op de Coul 7 Sources NRC 22 November Comments ‘The vivacity in 2’

No. 2 Title Peasant woman from Nuenen
Faille 1928/1970 - Op de Coul 7 Sources NRC 22 November Comments ‘The vivacity in 2’

No. 3 Title Peasant woman (half-length)
Faille 1928/1970 - Op de Coul 7 Sources NRC 22 November Comments ‘The vivacity in 2’

No. 4 Title Willow tree
Faille 1928/1970 195/10 Op de Coul 195 Sources NRC 22 November Comments ‘The vivacity in 2’

Reconstruction of

This exhibition is not mentioned in De la Faille 1928. Nor are any work numbers known.

All sources date from 1903.
No. 5
Title Peasant digging
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 6
Title Peasant dwelling (interior)
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 78 (?)
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 7
Title Still life
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 54
Plasschaert -
Sources Wk 14 November, p. 514 (ll.); DZ-H 15 November (ll.)
Comments no. 34 is also possible

No. 8
Title Young peasant
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 9
Title Still life
Faille 1928/1970 - / 63
Op de Coul 63
Plasschaert (dogs, small bottle, small brown pot, canvas on canvas
Sources Kr 14 November, p. 363; RN 16 November; NRC 22 November; OK, II, p. 174
Comments -

No. 10
Title Rocky landscape
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 11
Title Peasant woman (half-length)
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments See comments on no. 3

No. 12
Title Weaver
Faille 1928/1970 - / 29 or 162
Op de Coul 29
Plasschaert canvas, white walls, red carpet
Sources Kr 7 November, p. 356; OK, II, p. 147
Comments Based on the colour description F 29 (JH 471) is the only possible candidate

No. 13
Title Head of a woman (white neckerchief)
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 14
Title Small head of a woman
Faille 1928/1970 - / 133 and 153a
Op de Coul 133
Plasschaert light green-blue ground
Sources NRC 22 November
Comments Based on the NRC description F 133 (JH 584) is the most likely candidate. F 153a (JH 586) is probably no. 24

No. 15
Title Women on the land
Faille 1928/1970 - / 97
Op de Coul 97
Plasschaert potatoes
Sources Wk 14 November, p. 514 and 21 November, p. 533 (ll.); DZ-H 15 November and 22 November (ll.); NRC 22 November
Comments Own observation in the photo archives of the Kröller-Müller Museum; on the back is an Oldenzeel label and a small label marked no. 15 (fig. 6)

No. 16
Title Peasant woman from Nuenen
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 22 November
Comments There is something fantastic in the eyes of the woman in no. 16

No. 17
Title Peasant dwelling
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 18
Title Landscape with peasant dwelling
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 187
Plasschaert -
Sources Ah 7 November; RN 16 November; NRC 22 November; Kr 19 December, p. 404
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments 'Landscape with peasant dwelling in twilight of gold and brown. Evening-darkened cloud above roof ridge and chimney' (Kr)

No. 19
Title Small head of a woman
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 20
Title Peasant at work
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 21
Title Head of a woman, white cap
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert light green dress, what a woman
Sources -
Comments -

No. 22
Title Head of a woman
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 134
Plasschaert red cap, green ground
Sources -

No. 23
Title Still life (gai and melons)
Faille 1928/1970 - / 59
Op de Coul 59
Plasschaert ornamental pears
Sources Kr 7 November, p. 356; Wk 14 November, p. 514 and 21 November, p. 533 (ll.); DZ-H 15 November and 22 November (ll.); RN 16 November; NRC 22 November; OK, II, p. 174
Comments -

No. 24
Title Peasant woman
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul ?
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 25
Title Girl in the woods
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 8a
Plasschaert document study
Sources -
Comments Identification based on description by Plasschaert

54 All sources date from 1903.
55 See note 34. The painting ‘Peasant dwelling’ represents a tumbledown sheepfold, as shown by a letter from Mrs. J. Huët-Pierson to A. Tellegen-Hoogendoorn, 5 March 1965 (The Hague, RKD). The present location of the painting, which does not figure in De la Faille 1928 or 1970, is unknown.
Sources AH 7 November
Comments 'That country road with the tragically high trees against the sky in motion'

No. 54
Title Head of a woman, widow
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 155
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments Shawl indicates mourning

No. 55
Title Ditch with bridge, at evening
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 189
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments identification based on subject

No. 56
Title Weaver
Faille 1928/1970 - / 30
Op de Coul 30
Plasschaert the frame of a houdroom, gold mat (?) ground, how the little lamp hangs
Sources Kr 14 November, p 363; NRC 15 November, OK, II, p. 174
Comments -

No. 57
Title Weaver
Faille 1928/1970 - / 35
Op de Coul 37
Plasschaert with house and tree through window-panes
Sources Kr 14 November, p 363; NRC 15 November
Comments Plasschaert's note was the deciding factor: F 37 (JH 501), not F 35 (JH 478), was the work exhibited

Sources NRC 22 November
Comments 'The clarity and whiteness in that beautiful Brabant day-labourer’s house'

No. 58
Title Young peasant woman
Faille 1928/1970 - / SP 1668
Op de Coul SP 1668
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 22 November
Comments Own observation: Oldenzeel label on back marked no. 58. See comments on no. 17

No. 59
Title Weaver (half-length)
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 26
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments Identification based on addition to title of 'half-length':

Sources -
Comments -

No. 60
Title Brickant cottage
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 7
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments -

No. 61
Title Landscape
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 121
Plasschaert -
Sources RN 16 November
Comments 'Landscape with sunken road towards the gold-streaked sky'

No. 62
Title Peasant dwelling
Faille 1928/1970 - / SP 91
Plasschaert -

Sources -
Comments -

No. 63
Title Peasant woman
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 7
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments Watercolour:

Sources -
Comments -

No. 68
Title Three men
Faille 1928/1970 - / 948
Op de Coul 948
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments -

No. 69
Title Woman praying
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 1179
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Comments F 1053 (JH 357) and F 1179 (JH 324) are possible candidates. Provenance makes the latter more likely

No. 70
Title Residents of Scheveningen on a bench
Faille 1928/1970 - / 951
Op de Coul 951
Plasschaert -
Sources -
Scheveningen on a bench reminiscient of 't Bezuidenhout

Sources Kr 7 November, p. 356
Comments -

No. 71
Title View from Vincent’s home
Faille 1928/1970 - / 943
Op de Coul 943
Plasschaert long roof
Sources Wk 21 November, p. 533; CZ H 22 November
Comments -

No. 72
Title In the church
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 1095
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments -

No. 73
Title Landscape, fields
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 904
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments 'Watercolour no. 73, Fields under sunny sky'

No. 74
Title Landscape, snow off trees
Faille 1928/1970 - / 1095
Op de Coul 1095
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments -

No. 75
Title Peasant woman
Faille 1928/1970 - / -
Op de Coul 5
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments -

No. 76
Title Landscape, meadow
Faille 1928/1970 - / 916
Op de Coul 916
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments -

No. 77
Title Horse
Faille 1928/1970 - / 1032
Op de Coul 1032
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments -

No. 78
Title Landscape
Faille 1928/1970 - / 1104
Op de Coul 1104
Plasschaert -
Sources NRC 8 November
Comments -

fig. 7
Cover of the Dagblad van Zuid-Holland en ’s Gravenhage, 15/16 November 1903, The Hague, RKD
**VAN GOGH MUSEUM**

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| 79  | Bible reader (fig. 7) | Faille 1928/1970 - / -  
Op de Coul 1088  
Sources Kr 14 November, p. 356; NRC 8 November; RN 16 November  
Comments -  |
| 80  | Landscape with trees | Faille 1928/1970 - / -  
Op de Coul 1088  
Landscape, without Faille no. 96  
Plasschaert  
Sources NRC 8 November  
Comments Watercolour according to NRC  |
| 81  | Marshy landscape | Faille 1928/1970 - / -  
Op de Coul 846  
Plasschaert the violence of the sky made motionless  
Sources Kr 7 November, p. 356; NRC 8 November; RN 16 November  
Comments -  |
| 82  | Woman spinning | Faille 1928/1970 - / -  
Op de Coul ?  
Plasschaert  
Sources -  
Comments -  |
| 83  | Winter beach | Faille 1928/1970 - / -  
Op de Coul 982  
Plasschaert Mauve-like  
Sources Kr 14 November, p. 363  
Comments -  |
| 84  | Orchard | Faille 1928/1970 - / -  
Op de Coul 1088  
Plasschaert  
Sources -  
Comments -  |

*The work (not in De la Faille 1928 or 1970) is reproduced in Johannes van de Wolke et al., *exhib. cat. Vincent van Gogh: drawings, Otterlo (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller) 1990, p. 124, no. 72.*
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* = information derived from Faille 1970

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Vincent van Gogh, Still life: vase with fourteen sunflowers (F 457 JH 1666), 1889, Tokyo, Seiji Togo Memorial Yasuda Kasai Museum of Art (on permanent loan from the Yasuda Fire & Marine Insurance Company Ltd)
Collecting paintings by Van Gogh in Britain before the Second World War

Madeleine Korn

In his 1954 account of the reception of modern foreign art in Britain, Douglas Cooper concluded that ‘few’ collectors had shown a taste for modern French painting before the Second World War, and that only a handful of works by Van Gogh had entered British collections in this period. More than 50 years later, in a survey of early collectors of Van Gogh’s work, Walter Feilchenfeldt wrote that by 1914 ‘There were perhaps three pictures in England but no collectors.’ While a few more isolated examples have been identified in more recent accounts – such as Anna Gruetzner Robin’s Modern art in Britain 1910-14 – scholars have generally underestimated the collecting of paintings by Van Gogh in Britain during the period 1888-1939. This article provides a fuller account of the patterns of collecting Van Goughs in Britain in these years. It will show that a far greater number of paintings were in Britain before the Second World War than has previously been acknowledged.

The article draws attention to the number of works acquired as early as the 1880s and 90s. It highlights changes in the pattern of collecting from the acquisition of Van Gogh’s work by artist-friends and dealer-friends in the earliest decades to that by wealthy entrepreneurs in the 1920s and 30s. In the case of the latter, these paintings were part of large collections of modern foreign art. It further compares the collecting of Van Gogh’s work by British buyers to that of the other post-impressionists, namely Cézanne, Gauguin and Seurat. Special consideration is given to the market in Scotland where a considerable proportion of the total number of Van Gogh paintings in Britain were bought. It also evaluates the popularity among British collectors of particular periods and subject matter. In so doing it considers various factors affecting the collecting of Van Gogh’s art in Britain; the critical response in Britain to his art; the impact of Roger Fry’s writings and his exhibition of post-impressionism in London in 1910; and the influence of the other post-impressionist exhibitions held around the country.

General patterns of collecting, 1880–1939

The table in Appendix I records the name of the collector, the date of purchase of each painting and the work’s present whereabouts. It shows that some 56 Van Goughs were acquired by British collectors in the period 1888-1939. This figure represents 6.6 percent of Van Gogh’s total recorded output of paintings. However, given that out of this total around 120 paintings remained in the possession of his family, never having been sold on the

2 Walter Feilchenfeldt (with Han Veenenbos), Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cassirer, Berlin: the reception of Van Gogh in Germany from 1901 to 1914, Zwolle 1988, p. 41.
4 For the purposes of this study the term ‘British’ refers to collectors who acquired works either in this country or abroad but who ultimately brought them to Britain. No distinction has been made as to the means of acquisition i.e. whether the works were purchased, part-exchanged or given as a gift. The term ‘collector’ refers to any person owning at least one painting by Van Gogh. It includes only works in private collections.
6 Where the present whereabouts of a painting is not known its last owner or sale details are given.
7 This number may well be higher but certain information still remains inaccessible, being kept by a number of private galleries in Britain and abroad.
8 These are approximate figures and have been rounded up.
open market, the proportion of Van Gogh’s paintings in British hands in these years amounts to 7.7 percent. Appendix I further shows that some of Van Gogh’s greatest works, including both *Still life: vase with fourteen Sunflowers* (fig. 1) and *Self portrait with bandaged ear* (fig. 2), were once in Britain.

The data also clearly shows that patterns of collecting changed over the period under consideration. Several works were in Britain as early as the late 1880s. However, over 80 percent were acquired in the 1920s and 30s. Some 30 collectors have been identified as owning only one work, four as having two. Appendix I shows that although this pattern dominated, several collections were formed containing three or more examples and one collection had as many as six. Paintings from the Arles years were acquired in greater numbers than those of Van Gogh’s earlier periods. However, a greater proportion of the total number of works produced in Paris (10 percent) were purchased by British collectors than those painted in Arles (8 percent).

Most of the works acquired were landscapes (39), with portraits (6) and still life (11) subjects never being as popular.

### Early acquisitions

This section discusses paintings by Van Gogh in Britain before 1900. The first paintings owned by a British collector were acquired as early as 1887. Both *Still life* (F 579 JH 1541) and an as-yet unidentified portrait of Alexander Reid were owned by the Scottish dealer Alexander Reid (1854-1928) around 1887. The Scottish painter A.S. Hartrick (1864-1950), who studied at Cormon’s studio in Paris with Van Gogh, noted the acquisitions in his memoirs. They were acquired from the artist himself, al-
though it is not known whether Reid was given the paintings or if they were purchased for a small sum. Hartrick wrote: ‘Reid got into serious trouble with his father for acquiring or investing in some of Van Gogh’s work, but I cannot believe he gave much money for them or I should have heard about it from the painter.’

Although it has generally been thought that Reid first met Vincent around 1886-87, when the former was sent by his father to Boussod, Valadon & Cie in Paris, it is possible that their first meeting took place some ten years earlier, whilst Van Gogh was working for Goupil’s in London. Three references to a ‘Mr Reid’ appear in Vincent’s letters during 1876 and a number of editions of the correspondence believe these are in fact references to the Scottish dealer Alexander Reid.  

As early as May of that year Van Gogh noted: ‘This afternoon Mr Reid sent me a catalogue of the exhibition in London!’ [86/66]. In a second letter, sent in June, Van Gogh writes: ‘One night I stayed at Mr Reid’s […]’ [82/69]. That this person was working in a London gallery at the time is made clear in the third reference. In October he mentions that whilst walking to London he had met ‘many acquaintances’ in the area around the Strand, ‘where most of the picture galleries are […]’, among them ‘Mr Reid and Mr Richardson, who are already old friends’ [92/76]. Reid, therefore, may have already been well acquainted with Vincent by the time he was sent by his father to work in Paris in 1886.

Here he took up a post at Boussod, Valadon with Theo van Gogh. Shortly after his arrival he moved in with the two brothers in their apartment on Rue Lépic. Following Vincent’s suggestion that they commit suicide in a joint act, however, Reid moved out having stayed just six months. He remained in Paris for some time after the incident, finally returning with the paintings to Britain around the end of 1888. This makes them the first works by Van Gogh to come to these shores. As fate would have it, both were sold by his father to a dealer from France, sometime before 1905, for the paltry sum of £60. Although the still life can be easily identified from Vincent’s letters, the portrait of Reid cannot and may well have since been destroyed.

The artist Lucien Pissarro (1863-1944) acquired Still life: basket of apples (F 578 JH 1540) in 1887. He exchanged the work with Vincent for one of his own whilst the two artists were living in Paris. In November 1890 Pissarro, who was French by birth, came to live in London, where in 1892 he married an English woman, Esther Levy Bensusan. Pissarro stayed in Britain for the rest of his life, joining a number of British art circles, including theliterary Group and the Camden Town Group. The painting remained in his possession until around 1908 when, like Reid’s works, it, too, was sold to a dealer abroad.

While the three previous works are believed to have been given or part-exchanged by the artist, three paintings were actually purchased by British collectors in the 1890s. Two crabs (F 606 JH 1862) was in the collection of William Cherry Robinson (died 1915) by 1908. The painting was purchased in the Netherlands from Jo van Gogh-Bonger.
Theo’s widow, in May 1893 for 200 guilders. Robinson may well have first seen the work in 1892, when it was included in an exhibition of 45 paintings in The Hague. Although De la Faille recorded this collector as living in Bournemouth, recently discovered documentation shows that he was Consul for North Holland and resided at the British Consulate in Amsterdam. He was appointed in 1882 and resigned in 1906, the year the work was sold at auction in Amsterdam.

Mr Thomas Fisher Unwin (1848–1935) acquired a flower still life sometime in the early 1890s from Père Tanguy in Paris. Although this must have been before 1894, when Tanguy died, there is some evidence to suggest the purchase may have been made as early as 1891. Hartrick remembers it being “the year after [Van Gogh’s] death.” He also writes that the Unwins were persuaded to buy it by the artist Joseph Pennell (1857–1926). The painting has never been identified and is only known through a number of references in texts. It has been described as a ‘small still life of “spikey flowers”’ in a ‘jug.’ Hartrick writes that it was signed ‘Vincent’ and bought by Unwin for ‘25 francs,’ around £1 at the time, a price some-

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22 A 10% commission was paid to a certain Miss Schleier; see Chris Stolwijk and Han Veenenbos, The account book of Theo van Gogh and Jo van Gogh-Bonger, Leiden 2002, entries 11/11 and 11/12.

23 Exhib. cat. Works by Vincent van Gogh, Buitenhof (Haagsche Kunstkring) 1892.

24 Information provided by Elaine Camroux-McLean of the Public and Historical Enquiries Team at the Foreign Office.

25 As it is now known the work was sold when Robinson left his position at the embassy, it is possible the picture never in fact came to Britain. It was auctioned at Frederik Muller (Amsterdam), 13 November 1906, lot 33. The sale included another drawing by Van Gogh and works by the artists of the Hague School. However, as works from other collections were also included in the sale it is unclear whether any of these also belonged to Robinson.

26 Unwin was married to the sister of Sickert’s wife.


28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 New research suggests that it may be Still life: vase with vascaria (F 324a JH 336). This painting is now known to have been acquired by Alex Reid of Glasgow in the early 1920s, around the date the Unwins sold the painting (Tate Gallery Archives, Ref 2002/1).
what higher, he notes, than Van Gogh's other paintings at Tanguy's because it was framed. According to Clive Bell, it could be seen 'hanging outside Fisher Unwin's flat at the Albany where it was the object of frequent derogatory comments.' However, Bell was mistaken when he recalls seeing it 'in a mixed show at the New Galleries somewhere about 1904.' It was in fact not shown in London until 1909, when it was lent by Unwin to the Ninth exhibition of the international society of sculptors, painters and gravers (ISSPG) at the New Gallery. The work is believed to have been sold 'about thirty years' later for £1,200.

Esther (1883-1954) and Alfred (1885-1933) Sutro bought Interior of a restaurant in Arles (fig. 5) in 1896. At the time Esther Sutro, herself an artist, was living with her husband in Paris. Here they were introduced to Van Gogh's work by Edouard Vuillard. Alfred Sutro recalled the purchase: '[Vuillard] was pleased that we liked his work, and said to us one day that it was just possible we might like Van Gogh too. He took us to see a picture of Van Gogh's, that had for quite some considerable time been on show at Vollard's, the dealer; it was a picture of chairs and tables in a café in Arles, chairs and tables with a figure or two at the back. My wife — a painter herself — loved it at sight, and we bought it for the three hundred francs that M. Vollard was asking. It is now worth a very considerable sum.' Vollard held two one-man shows of Van Gogh's work in 1892, the first in the summer and the second in November. It was from the first of these that it is believed the Sutros bought their painting. The Van Goghs acquired by the Unwins and the Sutros were among the first of the artist's works to be sold by dealers in Paris.

These acquisitions of Van Gogh's work pre-date British collectors' interest in the work of other post-impressionists. It was not until 1892 that the first painting by Gauguin was acquired, while pictures by Cézanne and Seurat were acquired only in 1911 and 1919 respectively. While both Cézanne's and Gauguin's work was later to prove more popular in Britain, until 1911 more paintings by Van Gogh were in British hands than those by his contemporaries.

Although their number may seem insignificant, by placing these acquisitions in the context of Van Gogh collecting in other countries at the time, it is possible to demonstrate their importance. These British collectors were among the earliest collectors of his work, few paintings having been sold during his lifetime. However, while new research has shown that a number of collectors were also buying in France, the Netherlands and Denmark around the same time as those in Britain, collectors in other countries had yet to venture into the market. The first Van Gogh purchase made by a German collector was not until around 1900. This is interesting given that Germany was a country where by 1914 some of the greatest collections of his work would be formed. No American collector acquired a Van Gogh until 1912. Whilst by 1896 at least six paintings by Van Gogh were owned by British collectors, in 1904 Germany could still only boast seven paintings in private collections. As late as 1915 only four paintings were owned by collectors in America. Although Britain was not to hold this position for long, it must nevertheless be recognised that for a brief period it was one of the leading countries.

34 Cooper, op. cit. (note 1), p. 62, note 3.
35 Flowers, no. 169 De la Faille incorrectly records that F 549 JH 1572, the work owned by the Sutros, was lent to the exhibition.
37 Alfred Sutro, Celebrities and simple souls, London 1933, p. 27.
39 One painting, F 495 JH 1626, is recorded as having been acquired by Anna Boch in February 1890. It has been suggested that as another work by Van Gogh is also known to have been in her collection this was likely to have been bought at the same time. See Feilchenfeldt, op. cit. (note 2), p. 8. If Rend did in fact pay for his paintings, however, this would make them the first of Van Gogh's paintings to have been purchased.
40 I am most grateful to Chris Stolwyk in drawing my attention to this. Cooper maintained that the only collections in the early 1890s were Pierre Morin and Comte de la Rochefoucauld in France. See further Cooper, op. cit. (note 1), p. 69, note 1.
41 This first work is believed to have been acquired by Harry Graf Kessler.
42 Saltzman, op. cit. (note 38), p. 111.
43 Ibid.
44 Saltzman notes that by the time of the Armory Show in New York (1913) there were four paintings in America; see ibid. Feilchenfeldt had previously stated that there were only two works by 1914, see Feilchenfeldt, op. cit. (note 2), p. 41.
Early patterns of collecting

By examining the personal details of these early collectors, a number of patterns can be identified. Collectors before 1900 are all known to have had some form of contact with Van Gogh and his work. In the 1880s this was direct, as in the cases of Reid and Lucien Pissarro. By the 1890s it was indirect, through the artist’s close friends and supporters both in Britain and abroad. The Sutros and Fisher Unwin were introduced to Van Gogh’s art through fellow artists in Paris. I would suggest that until 1910 a collector’s decision to purchase a work by Van Gogh was ultimately determined by such contacts. Van Gogh was thus successful in Britain in these early years, as indeed was Gauguin, because he had contact with collectors that the other post-impressionists did not. This evidence lends further weight to the theory put forward by Malcolm Gee that the nature of a collector’s ‘artistic contacts’ were ‘crucial in determining’ his collecting practice, and that ‘access to new artistic ideas’ was one of the most important factors in his decision to buy avant-garde art.

Before 1910, collectors of Van Gogh’s work in Britain were also those professionally involved in the arts. It was this group who ‘were […] best placed to see and appreciate new developments in the visual arts.’ Both Lucien Pissarro and Esther Sutro were artists, living and painting in the same environment in France as the artists whose work they admired and whose style they wished to emulate. Whilst not himself an artist, as a dealer Reid was in a profession that also gave him access to new artistic trends.

That British collectors of the period all owned only one or two examples of Van Gogh’s art was not unique. This pattern was common to collectors in Britain and in other countries with the work of all four post-impressionist artists. Although there were a few wealthier ‘aesthete’ collectors of post-impressionist painting, before 1910 most were of modest means, often ‘early amateurs, friends, and former students’ of the artist, and their lack of funds would have seriously curtailed their purchasing power. Post-impressionist collectors who undertook the adventurous championing of a small, misunderstood avant-garde saw the acquisition of this art not as an investment or a symbol of their socio-economic position, but as a means of showing their individuality and originality through a refusal to follow the general taste of the day. For many, ownership of this specifically modern art symbolised their belonging to the new avant-garde that defined itself through this culture. The works were thus a signifier of the cultural milieu to which they belonged. Affiliation with this cultural elite not only gave collectors access to the ideas of the group but also made them more receptive to them.

During this period Van Gogh’s paintings were mainly acquired in Paris. Opportunities to see them did not exist in Britain until 1910 and, as a result, only those collectors who had contact with the artist’s work through the avant-garde milieu in Paris or another centre of production were able to buy it. This also indicates that this particular group of collectors were drawn to the French capital out of a desire to be identified with the specifically bohemian modernism of Paris of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their trips abroad were symbolic not of their wealth but of their individuality and interest in gaining cultural knowledge through travel, directly at its source. In most instances the collectors had lived for a time in close association with these avant-garde Parisian circles.

Cornelius Frank Stoop

A further Van Gogh work was acquired by a British collector before Fry’s show of 1910. Frank Stoop (1865-1955) purchased Farms near Auvers (F 795 JH 2114) on 5 January of that year for 8,000 Reichsmark from Paul Cassirer in Berlin. Previously unpublished letters refer to
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the dealings between Stoop, Jo van Gogh-Bonger (by now Mrs J. Cohen Gosschalk-Bonger) and the dealer J.H. de Bois, acting on her behalf. Stoop was in Amsterdam in 1911 and, interested in acquiring more of Van Gogh's work, contacted De Bois, who wrote to Jo, stating: 'In particular I am writing to tell you of the Stoop family. At the moment they are staying at the Hotel des Indes and would love to see your collection. Mr Stoop will pay you a visit. He previously acquired a Van Gogh painting from Cassirer and wishes to enlarge his collection.' As a result of the visit, two oils and a number of watercolours were sent to Stoop in London. I believe the paintings were *Dog roses or branches of wild briar* (F 597 JH 203), referred to as 'Wild roses,' and *Still life: apples* (F 254 JH 1542), which is called 'Apples' in the correspondence. In the end, however, Stoop decided to purchase only three of the watercolours. His exact reasons for returning the oils are not known, but it may well have been that he simply did not care for still lifes, a subject that did not feature in his collection of modern foreign art. As we have seen, apart from the portrait of Reit, the paintings by Van Gogh in Britain before Fry's show in 1910 were all either landscapes or still lifes.

**Manet and the post-impressionists, 1910**

Whilst British collectors of Van Gogh's art were among the first in Europe in the 1880s and 90s, within 20 years the situation had changed dramatically: Britain had been left behind, both in the exhibiting and collecting of his and other post-impressionist art. By 1910 Van Gogh's work had gained a degree of respectability in several European countries and was considered more desirable than the pictures of the impressionists. By now Van Gogh had been given large one-man shows in private galleries in Paris and a number of other European cities, including The Hague, Copenhagen and Berlin, and a major retrospective in Amsterdam in 1905. In Britain, on the other hand, his paintings had yet to be even exhibited. In 1905 alone the German dealer Paul Cassirer had sold 20 Van Gogh paintings, primarily to German collectors.

Collectors in Germany were not alone and by 1910 large collections of Van Gogh's art had been formed in Paris, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Denmark. In fact, by this time neither his work nor that of the other post-impressionists was considered avant-garde in the eyes of the buying public in these countries, having already been replaced by the art of the Cubists and Fauves. In Britain, where post-impressionism remained virtually unseen until 1910, paintings by Van Gogh were still perceived as being as radical as those by Matisse and Picasso.

In 1910 Roger Fry organised *Manet and the post-impressionists*, held at the Grafton Galleries in London. This introduced the work of the post-impressionists to the British public on a large scale. Whilst recognised by both dealers and collectors in other countries, this was the first time the four major artists had been shown together as a group. It was in London that the term 'post-impressionist' was coined when Fry used it to describe these painters as the successors to impressionism. As Anna Gruetzner-Robins writes, the 1910 exhibition for the first time 'created a posthumous group identity for them, and cemented their reputations as the giants of Post-Impressionism.' The significance of Fry's show must, therefore, be acknowledged in the wider context of the history of post-impressionism rather than just Britain alone.

It was at this show that a painting by Van Gogh was first exhibited in Britain. However, the work of two of the other post-impressionists had already been seen. Cézanne's paintings had been shown in Britain on several occasions by 1910. From 1898 his work was displayed at the exhibitions of the ISSPG and in 1905 Durand-Ruel had exhibited ten paintings with those of the impressionists at the Grafton Galleries. A painting by Gauguin had been shown clearly be identified as having been associated with the New English Art Club. See further Madeleine Kom, *Collecting modern foreign art in Britain before the Second World War* (diss, University of Reading, 2001), pp. 37-38.

52 A watercolour by Van Gogh was, however, exhibited at the eighth exhibition of the ISSPG in 1908.

53 Stoop purchased the Van Goghs in his collection from Amsterdam and Berlin, although he did buy works by other artists from Vollard in Paris. A number of works on paper are also known to have been in Britain at the time, including F 860 JH 38 and F 875 JH 4, which were owned by G.H. Slot.


55 Ibid., 13 January 1911, b 5392 V/1996.

56 The watercolours were all landscapes. For a detailed account of other works in Stoop's collection see Kom, op. cit. (note 51), pp. 106-18.


59 For a detailed account of this exhibition see Gruetzner Robins, op. cit. (note 3), pp. 15-45.

60 Ibid., p. 18.

in 1908, again at the ISSPG, and just a few months before Fry's show, an exhibition organised in Brighton by Robert Dell had included three Gauguins. Seurat's work was not seen until 1910, when two paintings were included in Fry's show, and it would not be until 1912 that his work was seen again.

There were more works by Van Gogh in Fry's 1910 exhibition than by any of the other post-impressionists. This is somewhat surprising as in 1908 Fry had stated that Cézanne's position as leader of the group was 'already assured.' From this moment he and his Bloomsbury affiliates continued to assert that Cézanne was 'the great and original genius [...] who really started' the movement. In the introduction to the 1910 catalogue Desmond MacCarthy gave the reader to understand that both Van Gogh and Gauguin had merely followed 'the path he [Cézanne] indicated,' and that Van Gogh had found 'the methods of Cézanne [...] a means of conveying the wildest and strangest visions conceived by any artist of our time.'

Fry's show provoked a violent and abusive response from the British public and the press, but some of the severest criticisms were reserved for Van Gogh's work. The reviews can best be summarised by the words that appeared in The Morning Post which declared that his paintings were 'the visualised ravings of an adult maniac.' His portraits and figure studies in particular received a much greater degree of abuse than his still lifes or landscapes.

This is reflected in the works bought by British collectors over the next 50 years. By 1925 there was only one portrait out of a total of some 20 paintings in British collections, the proportion of portraits to landscapes remaining low throughout the period 1920-39.

Only two post-impressionist paintings are known to have been bought from the show by British collectors, one of which was by Van Gogh. This was Factories at Asnières, seen from the Quai de Clichy (F 517 JH 1587) which was acquired by Gustav Robins. On 16 January 1911 he wrote to Jo, asking her about the painting and stating: 'Je viens d’acheter.' Despite the lack of sales, however, it seems likely the show and the ensuing publicity influenced purchases of work by Van Gogh and the other post-impressionists made soon after. Herbert Coleman (c. 1882-1949), who owned Van Gogh's The Auvers stairs with five figures (fig. 4) by June 1913, could have purchased it as early as 1910 when Bernheim-Jeune, from whom Coleman would eventually buy it, acquired it from Jo. Immediately following the show, Sir Michael Ernest Sadler (1861-1945) began negotiations in Paris to buy works by Gauguin and Cézanne that had been exhibited in London at the show.

It is interesting to note Cooper's total failure to acknowledge the collecting activities of Stoop, Robins and Coleman in the years 1910-14. Writing in 1954, he claimed that 'Certainly with the exception of Lucien Pissarro no other English collector seems to have owned any of Van Gogh’s] pictures until after 1914.' At the time of writing, Stoop's Van Gogh had been hanging in the Tate Gallery for some 20 years, having been bequeathed in 1935.

Fry's impact on British collectors, 1910-20

Through both his shows and his writings, Fry undoubtedly educated a large segment of public opinion. Within a relatively short span of time, his efforts resulted in a British audience that was well informed and conversant with the work of the post-impressionists. However, this would not be translated into sales for almost a further decade. Although sales of post-impressionist art did increase between 1910 and 1920, a total of only 20 paintings were acquired. Of these, only two were by Van Gogh. No significant change in the patterns of collecting post-impressionist art in Britain took place until the early 1920s. Appendix II shows that although Fry promoted Cézanne as the leader of the group, the only post-impressionist who made any headway during this time was Gauguin. Sales of Gauguin's works continued to exceed those of Cézanne until the early 1930s.

63 Ibid., 'Cézanne-I,' The Burlington Magazine 16 (January 1910), p. 207.
65 Ibid., p. 11.
One reason for the relatively small number of post-impressionist works purchased between 1910 and 1920 is that, despite Fry's literary efforts, there were still few opportunities for collectors in Britain to see and come to terms with post-impressionism. Up until the 1920s the majority of exhibitions showed only a few post-impressionist pictures. Although exhibitions of modern foreign art were held in Britain in these years, on the whole they showed other, more recent forms of contemporary foreign art. The works purchased, therefore, were in the main still acquired abroad. Until the dealer system in Britain could provide an adequate supply, British collectors preferred to buy in countries where they were offered a greater choice of paintings from which to make their selection.

Between 1910 and 1920 Van Gogh's art received even less exposure in Britain than the work of either Cézanne or Gauguin. The only two exhibitions to contain any significant number of post-impressionist paintings in this period both totally excluded Van Gogh. The exhibition, Pictures by Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin, organised by Sadler and his son at the Stafford Gallery, London, in November 1911 displayed eight and 14 paintings by Cézanne and Gauguin respectively. Whilst the show must have gone a long way in helping to galvanise Fry's initial introduction of modernism to Britain, it may also account in part for the preference for these two artists' work over that of Van Gogh's in the following decade. Following the show, sales of Gauguin's paintings for the first time exceeded those of Van Gogh's. Fry's Second post-impressionist exhibition in 1912 included only examples of Cézanne's work. One painting by Van Gogh, the Unwin's still life, was in the re-hang of the exhibition. Exhibitions in Britain can thus be said to have done nothing to enhance Van Gogh's market position in Britain, except possibly in a negative way through their non-engagement with his art.

On the other hand, Fry's endeavours to promote post-impressionism in Britain may also have been thwarted to some extent by a number of factors beyond his control. The First World War halted all forms of cultural exchange.

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69 The other was Gauguin's Tahitiennes au repos, 1891 (London, National Gallery), which was acquired by Fry himself.

70 Robinow lived at 11 Downe Terrace, Richmond Hill, Surrey. However, how long the painting stayed in Britain is uncertain. By 1914 the painting is recorded as having been lent by a Paul M. Robinow, Hamburg, to the exhibition Vincent van Gogh, held at Paul Cassirer's in Berlin, (no. 24). See Gruetzner Robins, op. cit. (note 3), p. 35. Robinow also owned a Van Gogh still life (F 74 JH 648) that was lent to the show; it was entitled Malven (1886) and listed under no. 23. This is now believed to be a copy.


72 It was at this date that he lent it to an exhibition at the Leeds Arts Club; see exhib. cat. A loan exhibition of post-impressionist paintings and drawings, Leeds (Leeds Arts Club) 1913, no. 5. Landscape.

73 Stolwijk and Veenenbos, op. cit. (note 22), entries 17/15, 18/3, 92/19 and 93/9.

74 The work is noted by De la Faille as having been exhibited at Vincent van Gogh, Berlin (Paul Cassirer) 1914, no. 133, but the painting shown is more likely to have been the smaller work, The Auvers stairs with five figures (F 796 JH 2110). See Felchenfeldt, op. cit. (note 2), p. 121.

75 See further Korn, op. cit. (note 51), pp. 141-46.


77 For a collection of Fry's essays see further A Roger Fry reader, ed. Christopher Reed, London 1996.

78 The contribution of these shows to the reception of modern foreign art in Britain is well documented in Gruetzner Robins, op. cit. (note 3), which explores the way in which they served to validate and corroborate Fry's concepts of modern art.

79 For a detailed discussion of the exhibition see ibid., pp. 52-55.

80 Exhib. cat. Second post-impressionist exhibition, London (Grafton Galleries) 1912. Five paintings by Cézanne were included in the show. A number of works on paper were also shown. For a detailed account see Gruetzner Robins, ibid., pp. 64-107.

81 Exhib. cat. Re-arrangement of second post-impressionist exhibition, London (Grafton Galleries) 1913, no. 43. In this show 33 paintings by Cézanne were shown.

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Vincent van Gogh, The Auvers stairs with five figures (F 795 JH 2111), 1890, Saint Louis Art Museum.
between Britain and France, the Netherlands and Germany, affecting communications and supplies between dealers in these countries. Collectors' visits abroad would also have been curtailed if not completely stopped. No post-impressionist works were bought by British collectors from 1914 to 1918. Another factor that may have slowed sales but that cannot easily be assessed was the rising price of post-impressionist art. By the time collectors in Britain were made aware of post-impressionism, prices had already become prohibitive and buyers may well have been nervous of making such an outlay. Whilst only two post-impressionist paintings were purchased at the Grafton Galleries in 1910, £4,800 worth of cheaper works had been sold. Perhaps of even more significance was that it was during this decade that Fry was already being proclaimed the leader of a cultural elite whose chief focus was known to be recent developments in the avant-garde circles of Paris. Despite advocating post-impressionism in Britain, Bloomsbury members who owed their allegiance to Fry focused their collecting activities on the work of contemporary avant-garde artists.

Several changes in patterns of collecting were, however, already beginning to emerge in the 1910s. Although virtually all collectors of post-impressionism in Britain in this period are known to have bought their paintings abroad, and to have had some sort of link with the artists whose work they purchased, others, such as Stoop and Coleman, had considerable amounts of money at their disposal rather than being of modest means. They were also no longer professionally involved in the arts, as were earlier collectors: both Stoop and Coleman were businessmen. At the same time, however, there is nothing to suggest that either collector was interested in this art as a form of investment or as a possible money-making asset, and, although comfortably off, as with earlier collectors, neither engaged in the kind of large scale buying of post-impressionism by now associated with their counterparts abroad.

Sales in the 1920s and 30s
Between 1920 and 1939 British collectors bought a total of 46 paintings by Van Gogh. This was a dramatic increase compared to the previous three decades. The number of works sold in the 1920s alone amounted to 26. This was an eight-fold increase over the number bought in the previous decade (5) and also far exceeded the increase in sales of pictures by Cézanne and Gauguin (see Appendix II). Sales during the 1930s, which amounted to 19, showed no further signs of increase and in fact dropped. One reason for the overall slowing of sales of Van Gogh paintings – and indeed of all modern foreign art between 1929 and 1933 – was the Wall Street Crash and the ensuing years of the Depression.

Following the economic recovery around 1935-36, sales again increased. A further reason for the drop during the 1930s may be attributed to an even greater rise in the price of post-impressionist work. Although by the early 1920s prices had already long overtaken those asked for the impressionists, by the 1930s this gap had increased even further. A comparison of the sales of paintings by Van Gogh with paintings by Gauguin and Cézanne is instructive. Appendix II shows that during the period 1920-39 sales of Van Gogh's work in Britain were lower than those of paintings by Gauguin or Cézanne. This is surprising given the greater exposure of Van Gogh's work in Britain during these years than that of the other post-impressionists (see below). It is difficult to determine the exact reason, but in 1912 Van Gogh's significance as a major artist, together with Gauguin's, abated in Fry's opinion. Having seen Van Gogh's work hanging at the Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne that year, Fry began to feel that Van Gogh's use of colour was 'just a little monotonous' and that the works contained 'merely factual elements' that were 'no longer tolerable.' Indeed, it must be noted that sales of Seurat's work rose dramatically when in 1913 Fry made it known that he held him 'alongside and almost on the same level as Cézanne.'

Exhibiting Van Gogh in private galleries in Britain, 1920-39
As the number of exhibitions of works by Van Gogh and the other post-impressionists held in Britain increased after the First World War – due to the development of an effective dealer system in both England and Scotland – the number of their works in British collections increased accordingly. Fry's role in this growth in sales is difficult to establish. It is certainly possible that a number of private galleries were set up as a result of his influence. Whether or not he had any affect on which post-impressionist artists were exhibited, however, is questionable. For although Fry no longer considered Van Gogh's work important, during
the 1920s and 30s it was exhibited in much greater numbers than that of any other post-impressionist.

Van Gogh was the first of the post-impressionists to receive a one-man show in Britain, held at the Leicester Galleries in 1923. There were a total of three large one-man exhibitions of his work organised there, the second in 1926 and the third in 1930. By contrast, the first one-man show of Gauguin’s work took place only in 1924 and that of Cézanne’s in 1925. In addition to these solo exhibitions, Alex Reid & Lefèvre, the Independent Gallery and a host of other newly established galleries held mixed exhibitions of post-impressionist art during the 1920s and 30s.

Oliver Brown, owner of the Leicester Galleries, described the first of his Van Gogh shows in his memoirs. He noted: ‘Looking back, it is surprising to realise how few of the paintings were sold to our English visitors and how modest some of the prices seem now.’ He claimed that only two sales had been made to British collectors, but his memory must have been slipping a little by this time. He wrote: ‘The Earl of Sandwich bought an early landscape of the Dutch Period and a woman collector who lived in London bought a little painting called “On Montmartre” on the advice of Augustus John.’ In fact, the Earl of Sandwich is known to have owned only one painting by Van Gogh, namely, The outskirts of Paris (F 264 JH 1179), which is from his Paris period. In addition, the Earl acquired the picture from the 1926 show and not the one in 1925. The early Dutch work mentioned was in fact a drawing, Willows (F 147 JH 953), and was purchased at the same time as the painting, in 1926.

Mrs Eve Fleming (died 1964), who was indeed closely associated with John, acquired Peasant woman with a white cap: left three quarter view (F 140 JH 745) and not the landscape of Brown’s recollections. She moved to J.W.M. Turner’s home at 118 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, in 1925. It was in Turner’s large studio at the rear of the house, which was ‘decorated with gold wallpaper,’ that her collection of paintings was hung, including the portraits of her painted by John.

Brown apparently confused Fleming with Mrs C.S. Carstairs, a collector who owned mainly works by the impressionists. It was Mrs Carstairs who purchased the small painting Montmarte near the Upper Mill (F 272 JH 1185) from the 1925 show.

Brown also failed to note that a few days before the opening of the exhibition, Sadler had bought three drawings and an oil painting. A previously unpublished letter to the Leicester Galleries shows that Sadler expressed concern in case any of the works he had selected had also been chosen by the collector Samuel Courtauld (1876–1947) or the National Gallery in London. He informed Brown that if this were the case he did not wish to buy them. The gallery confirmed that the purchases would ‘not compete with Mr Courtauld and the National Gallery’ and Sadler thus bought the pictures, among them Olive trees: bright blue sky (fig. 5). In November 1923 Sadler purchased a second Van Gogh painting, Still life: one-eared vase with oleanders and books (F 593 JH 1566) from Alex Reid & Lefèvre. However, it was returned to the gallery in 1925 and ‘within the week’ bought by another British collector, Mrs Elizabeth Russe Workman (1874–c. 1957).

82 In the last few months of the war, however, Gwendoline Davies bought three Cézannes in Paris.
83 Gruetzner Robins, op. cit. (note 3), p. 16
84 Degas’s paintings were comparable in price to that of the post-impressionists but the works of Monet and the other landscapists had hardly risen during the last ten years.
85 Korn, op. cit. (note 51), p. 337.
88 Christopher Green (ed.), Art made modern. Roger Fry’s vision into art, London 1999, p. 208
89 No one-man shows of the post-impressionists were held in Scotland during this period
91 Ibid
93 Mrs Fleming was the widow of Valentine Fleming, MP. She was the mother of John’s illegitimate daughter, Amaryllis. See further Michael Holroyd, Augustus John: the new biography, London 1996, pp. 457-61.
94 He did three portraits of her; see further John Pearson, The life of Ian Fleming, London 1966, p. 29.
95 Mrs Carstairs owned work by Degas, Manet, Monet, Pissarro and Renoir.
96 Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, copy of a letter from the Leicester Galleries to Sadler, 15 November 1923, NG 1803.
97 The work was shown at Exhibition of the post-impressionist masters: Gauguin, Van Gogh, Toulouse-Lautrec: representative pictures by Renoir, London (Alex Reid & Lefèvre) October 1923, as Les Lauriers roses (no. 20).
98 The archives of Alex Reid and Lefèvre now show that this was not returned the same week it was bought by Sadler in 1923. He kept the painting until April 1925 when the work was returned and bought ‘within the week’ by Mrs Workman. See Alex Reid & Lefèvre: 1926–1976, London 1976, p. 18.
Patterns of collecting in the 1920s and 30s

The collecting of Van Gogh’s work in Britain in the 1920s and 30s again shared certain characteristics. During the 1920s collectors of post-impressionism in America and Europe came from a new socio-economic group – consisting mainly of industrial millionaires and bankers – that could afford to form vast art collections. By the 1920s post-impressionist art had gained respectability in these countries and was more likely to be bought either because collectors saw it as an investment or because these ‘cultured rich’ believed that the works endowed social status through their economic rather than their aesthetic value. In a way, then, this art still identified its owners as members of a cultural elite, albeit one for which the works now had a new meaning. Although collectors in Britain now also came from this same socio-economic group, they did not share its patterns of collecting. While in America and other European countries large collections of Van Gogh’s work were formed in the 1920s and 30s, this was never true in Britain, with the majority of collectors still owning only one or two examples. This may be explained by the fact that although these collectors were also millionaire industrial entrepreneurs, their wealth was never comparable to that of their counterparts abroad. It is probable, though, that for them, as for foreign collectors, the acquisition of these works was equally imbued with social meaning.

Notwithstanding, several collectors in Britain did in fact form collections containing more than just a few examples of Van Gogh’s work. The collection of Edith (1888–1952) and Alfred (1875–1968) Chester Beatty for example, which included six paintings by Van Gogh, not only equalled in size those formed in a number of other countries, but surpassed them in terms of quality. Beatty made his money in the mining industry. Within ten years of graduating as an engineer from Columbia University School of Mines, he had gone from ‘mucker’ to millionaire. He moved to London around 1912 and by the 1930s had become one of the wealthiest men in Britain. Alfred’s main interest was in oriental manuscripts and art, although he also brought together an impressive collection of 19th-century paintings of the Barbizon, Hague and realist schools. In 1928, however, he gave his wife a cheque for £100,000 in order for her to form her own art collection. From this date she began buying modern foreign art, which was hung on the walls of their palatial home, Baroda House, in Kensington Palace Gardens, London (fig. 6).
Whether these works were purchased on Edith's (fig. 7) own initiative or because her husband had told her to do so is the subject of much debate.  

Although Edith's early collecting focused on the work of the impressionists, by the mid-1930s it had switched to post-impressionism. While Courtauld's collection contained a greater total number of post-impressionist paintings, the Beattys had six works by Van Gogh, as compared to Courtauld's two. Of these, perhaps the best known are Portrait of Patience Escalier (fig. 8) and Still life: vase with fourteen sunflowers (fig. 1). Whilst the Sunflowers has become one of the most famous and controversial of Van Gogh's works, the fact that it was once in a British collection is seldom, if ever, mentioned.  

**Scottish collectors – an independent market**

Almost a third of all works by Van Gogh in British collections were acquired by Scottish collectors. After 1911 paintings by Cézanne and Gauguin were more popular in England than those by Van Gogh. In Scotland, however, his pictures were acquired in greater numbers than those of any other post-impressionist. The Scottish interest in Van Gogh's art did not, with the exception of Reid, predate that of the English collectors. Except for the two paintings Reid owned in the 1880s, no further works by Van Gogh entered a Scottish collection until the early 1920s.

This interest cannot be attributed to the exhibition of Van Gogh's work in Scotland earlier than in England. Other than a handful of paintings by Van Gogh and the other post-impressionists shown in Edinburgh and Glasgow just after Fry’s second post-impressionist show of 1912, Van Gogh's art in the main, like that of the other post-impressionists, was not shown in Scotland until the early 1920s. In the years following his return from Paris, Reid sought to advance the cause of the pre-impressionists and impressionists. The first post-impressionist works he showed in Glasgow were in January 1923, but these were by Cézanne and Gauguin. He did not include Van Gogh’s

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100 This was the term used by Fry to describe collectors of modern foreign art in the 1930s. See Roger Fry, *Henry Matisse*, London 1935; quoted in A Roger Fry reader, cit. (note 77), p. 410.
102 Chester Beatty was knighted in 1954, after Edith’s death.
103 The tramp (F 321a-JH-) is not confirmed in De la Faille as having been in Beatty’s possession, but a black and white photograph of the work appears in an album of the collection (Dublin, Chester Beatty Library Archives). It was with Arthur Tooth & Sons in 1970, the dealer who handled the disposal of a number of works from the Beatty collection. It is, however, no longer attributed to Van Gogh.
107 For a detailed discussion of collecting patterns in Scotland see Fowle, op. cit. (note 11).
108 Scottish collectors in Appendix 1 are shown in bold.
109 This show has only been identified through newspaper reviews; see Fowle, op. cit (note 11), p. 277.
An analysis of the Scottish exhibitions also shows that paintings by Van Gogh were not shown in greater numbers than those of any other post-impressionists. Indeed significantly fewer paintings by Van Gogh (5) were exhibited in Scotland than those by Cézanne (21) and Gauguin (19).

Several factors, however, may nonetheless help explain the Scottish preference. Firstly, it may be linked to their earlier acceptance of Dutch 19th-century landscapes, in particular those by the Hague School, and the long-standing connections between Scotland and northern Europe. Here, Van Gogh was seen above all as a painter in the Dutch tradition. His art, as Cynthia Saltzman has argued, appealed to northern European collectors because of its 'deep affinities to a collective visual heritage distinct from the classical tradition of Italy and France,' and it may well have found acceptance in Scotland because of this.

Secondly, many of these collectors, through their close relationship as both patrons and friends of the Scottish Colourists, were introduced and urged to accept this new phenomenon in art. Their boldly coloured works mirrored those of the post-impressionists and their heirs. Having thus familiarised themselves with the work of their compatriots, these Scottish collectors were more easily able to accept those of the post-impressionists. Thirdly, from the early 1920s onwards, two Scottish dealers in particular specialised in the work of Van Gogh. A number of works in Scottish collections were acquired through the partnership of Matthew L. Justice and James Tattersall. Although known to be art collectors, their activities as dealers have until now remained unacknowledged. These are documented in a previously unpublished letter sent to Cooper by Reid's son, A.J. McNeill Reid: `Matthew Justice was quite an important influence on the east coast. He was the head of a big furniture firm in Dundee, and a great friend of John Tattersall, who for a time worked with my father in Glasgow. [...] Justice got the idea that he might just as well buy the pictures in Paris and try to do some business himself. He and Tattersall went off to Bernheim Jeune, bought a few more, and did a quite good deal of business with Boyd.'

The Scottish collector

110 Important pictures by 19th century French masters, London/Glasgow (Alex Reid & Lefèvre) 1924. From 1923 Reid organised a number of shows in London, held in collaboration first with Agnew's and then Lefèvre. Several Scottish collectors visited these exhibitions and purchased works displayed there. In 1926 Reid went into partnership with Lefèvre.


113 Saltzman, op. cit. (note 38), p. 63.

114 Justice collected primarily Vuillard's work.

115 Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute, Research Library, Cooper papers, A.J. McNeill Reid to Douglas Cooper, 9 April 1953, box 14, folder 5.

116 William Boyd lived at Claremont, Broughty Ferry, Dundee. He also owned works by Monet, Sisley, Bonnard and Vuillard.

117 To date only works by Van Gogh have been identified as having been sold by Justice and Tattersall to Scottish collectors.
still alive in 1937, when she is recorded as having bought cates at the Scottish Record Office. Mrs Workman was Apollo 3 (March 1926) pp 139-44, 156. Workman in 1901 in Row in Scotland. I thank Frances Fowle for generously sharing this information with me. (note 98)

119 Elizabeth Russe Allan married Robert Alfred Manson, 'The Workman collection,' Fowle 120 James Bolivar Manson, 'The Workman collection,' Apollo 3 (March 1926) pp 139-44, 156.

121 Information taken from birth and marriage certificates at the Scottish Record Office. Mrs Workman was still alive in 1937, when she is recorded as having bought a painting by Derain from Alex Reid & Lefèvre

122 The place in Glasgow may have been an office. The pictures removed from this address in January 1921 were delivered to 77 Gracechurch Street, London. At the time of their marriage in 1901 Robert was living in Hampstead. By 1919 they were living at 67 Acacia Rd, London, NW8. By 1923 they had moved to 3 Seamer Place, Park Lane, London, W1. A three-day auction of the contents of this home took place around 10 December 1931 and was carried out by Curtis & Henson of Mount Street.

123 The commemorative book produced by Lefèvre in 1976 records that The hospital at Arles was bought from the exhibition in 1923. However, there is no record of this work having been in the Workman collection in any of the articles or exhibition catalogues of the day. See Alex Reid & Lefèvre, cit. (note 98), p. 18. Their name is not included in the work’s provenance in De la Faille.

124 Middleton lived in Dundee and was a printer and publisher of art cards. He acquired the work, which had been in the collection of Leopold Sutro, in 1943. He also owned at least five paintings by Matisse, making his one of the largest collections of this artist’s work in Britain before the Second World War.

Conclusion

This article has shown that whilst Britain cannot be said to have been the leading centre for the collecting of Van Gogh’s art, it can nevertheless be considered on the same footing as a number of other countries. In particular, it has drawn attention to a number of early purchases and demonstrated that British collectors did not lag behind in collecting Van Gogh’s art – in fact, in a number of instances examples were acquired in advance of those in other countries. Furthermore, it has demonstrated that, in contrast to many other European countries, large collections of his paintings were not formed from the early 1900s. The majority of British collectors owned only one or two works, regardless of their wealth. It is this pattern of collecting that invariably led to the significant number of pictures in Britain never previously having been acknowledged. Unfortunately, of these few now remain. The majority are today to be found in some of the most famous public and private collections in the world.

118 See op. cit. (note 97) and Alex Reid & Lefèvre, cit. (note 98)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acquired</th>
<th>Buyer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Whereabouts</th>
<th>F/JH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>c1888</td>
<td>Alexander Reid</td>
<td>Still life: basket of apples</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>St Louis, Saint Louis Art Museum</td>
<td>F 379 JH 1341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1888</td>
<td>Alexander Reid</td>
<td>Portrait of Alexander Reid</td>
<td>c1887</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1890-91</td>
<td>Lucien Pissarro</td>
<td>Still life: basket of apples</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Otterlo, Museum Kröller Muller</td>
<td>F 378 JH 1340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>William Cherry Robinson</td>
<td>Two crabs</td>
<td>1888/89</td>
<td>France, Private collection</td>
<td>F 606 JH 1662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1890s</td>
<td>Mr Thomas Fisher Unwin</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Mrs Edith Sutro</td>
<td>Interior of a restaurant in Arles</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Christie's, New York, 30 April 1996, lot 31</td>
<td>F 549 JH 1572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>Frank Steep</td>
<td>Farms near Auvers</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Tate Gallery</td>
<td>F 793 JH 2114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Gustave Riviére</td>
<td>Factories at Andrés, seen from the Quai de Clichy</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>St Louis, Saint Louis Art Museum</td>
<td>F 317 JH 1287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 1913</td>
<td>Herbert Colman</td>
<td>The Auvers stars with five figures</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>St Louis, Saint Louis Art Museum</td>
<td>F 795 JH 2111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1920s</td>
<td>William Boyd</td>
<td>Landscape of Fontville, with ploughman and mills in the background</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Boston, Museum of Fine Arts</td>
<td>F 706 JH 1794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1920s</td>
<td>Matthew Justice</td>
<td>Still life: one-eared vase with dianthus</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Present whereabouts unknown</td>
<td>F 236 JH 1130</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Davies Sistran</td>
<td>Landscape at Auvers in the rain</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Cardiff, National Museum of Wales</td>
<td>F 811 JH 2096</td>
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<td>1921</td>
<td>William Niclès</td>
<td>Moulin de la Galette</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Glasgow, Glasgow Art Gallery &amp; Museum</td>
<td>F 274 JH 1115</td>
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<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Sir Michael Sadler</td>
<td>Still life: one-eared vase with oleanders and books</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art</td>
<td>F 593 JH 1546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Mrs R.A. Workman</td>
<td>The hospital in Arles</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Collection Oskar Reinhart 'Am Römerholz,' Winterthur</td>
<td>F 645 JH 1866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Mrs C S Carstairs</td>
<td>Montmartre near the upper mill</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago</td>
<td>F 272 JH 1183</td>
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<td>1923</td>
<td>Mrs Eve Fleming</td>
<td>Peasant woman with a white cap, left three-quarter view</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland</td>
<td>F 140 JH 745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Sir James Murray</td>
<td>Still life: vase with daisies and poppies</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Present whereabouts unknown</td>
<td>F 325 JH -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Mrs R.A. Workman</td>
<td>The bridge at Triqueville</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>New York, André Meyer</td>
<td>F 426 JH 1468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Until 1925</td>
<td>Private collection/Justice?</td>
<td>A corner of the orchard</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland</td>
<td>F 553 JH 1387</td>
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<td>A corner of the orchard</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland</td>
<td>F 553 JH 1387</td>
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<td>1925</td>
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<td>Still life: one-eared vase with oleanders and books</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art</td>
<td>F 593 JH 1546</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Capt Stanley W. Sykes</td>
<td>The old widows</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Christie's, New York, 10 Nov 1987, lot 14</td>
<td>F 254 JH 1579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before 1927</td>
<td>William Boyd</td>
<td>The grove</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Sotheby's, New York, 8 Nov 1995, lot 12</td>
<td>F 817 JH 1319</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Samuel Courtauld</td>
<td>The plain of La Crau with orchard of peach trees</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>London, Courtauld Institute Galleries</td>
<td>F 514 JH 1681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1927</td>
<td>Matthew Smith</td>
<td>The cottage</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Sotheby's, London, 28 June 1961, lot 28</td>
<td>F 92 JH 810</td>
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<td>1885</td>
<td>Sotheby's, London, 28 June 1961, lot 28</td>
<td>F 92 JH 810</td>
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<tr>
<td>By 1928</td>
<td>C E Dix</td>
<td>Landscape at Fontville, with ploughman and mills in the background</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Boston, Museum of Fine Arts</td>
<td>F 706 JH 1794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 1928</td>
<td>James Tattersall</td>
<td>Moored ferries</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Sotheby's, London, 3 Dec 1991, lot 18</td>
<td>F 382 JH 1275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 1928</td>
<td>C Rawman</td>
<td>Restaurant Royal at Arles</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>Sotheby's, New York, 7 Nov 1979, lot 541</td>
<td>F 355 JH 1266</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Samuel Courtauld</td>
<td>Self portrait with bandaged ear</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>London, Courtauld Institute Galleries</td>
<td>F 527 JH 1657</td>
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<tr>
<td>c1928</td>
<td>Leopold Sutro</td>
<td>Corner of Voyer-d’Argenson Park at Asnières</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery</td>
<td>F 276 JH 1259</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>David W. T. Cargill</td>
<td>Still life: one-eared vase with zinnias</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Private collection</td>
<td>F 592 JH 1546</td>
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<tr>
<td>By 1932</td>
<td>Mrs Edith Chester Beatty</td>
<td>Sheaves of wheat</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art</td>
<td>F 771 JH 2125</td>
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<td>After 1932</td>
<td>Mrs Edith Chester Beatty</td>
<td>The Imp</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>London, Arthur Tooth</td>
<td>F 221 JH 1100</td>
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<td>1934</td>
<td>Mrs Edith Chester Beatty</td>
<td>Portrait of Patience Escalier, shepherd in the Provence</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Stavros S. Niarchos Collection</td>
<td>F 441 JH 1563</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>Roxy Middleton</td>
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<td>1887</td>
<td>Sotheby's, London, 3 Dec 1991, lot 18</td>
<td>F 382 JH 1275</td>
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<tr>
<td>By 1935</td>
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<td>Interior of a restaurant in Arles</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Christie's, New York, 30 April 1996, lot 31</td>
<td>F 549 JH 1572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By 1936</td>
<td>Mrs Edith Chester Beatty</td>
<td>Still life: vase with fourteen sunflowers</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Tokyo, Seiyu Memorial Yasuda</td>
<td>F 457 JH 1666</td>
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<tr>
<td>By 1936</td>
<td>Mrs Edith Chester Beatty</td>
<td>Trunk of an old yew tree</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Christie's, New York, 14 Nov 1989, lot 13</td>
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</table>
Appendix 2 - Analysis of the number of post-impressionist paintings in Britain before the Second World War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cézanne</th>
<th>Gauguin</th>
<th>Van Gogh</th>
<th>Seurat</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900s</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910s</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Otto Wacker (far right) on trial in Berlin
The Wacker forgeries: a catalogue

Stefan Koldehoff

Many of the so-called 'Wacker forgeries' – which until now have not been reliably catalogued – were evidently painted by Otto Wacker's (fig. 1) brother, the painter Leonhard Wacker, although he himself never confessed to his involvement. Among the items found by the police when they searched his studio was a study (fig. 2) after Van Gogh's frequently painted motif, Wheatfield with Reaper. This study, here published for the very first time, was examined on behalf of the Berlin police by Ludwig Thormaehlen, curator at the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, who wrote in his report: 'As far as I am concerned, there is no doubt whatsoever that this piece, like the "study" for the "self-portrait," is a preparatory study, i.e. a colour trial, for the corresponding Van Gogh forgery (De la Faille no. 525). The "study" is painted on a canvas that has already been used before, probably for a hurriedly executed preliminary sketch of a still life that was subsequently washed off. Still visible on the left-hand side is a circle in which the word "orange" has been written, and also the colour which was used to fill in the background. The canvas has been tacked several times, as can be seen from the holes along its top and bottom. The colours presumed by Wacker to have been used for an original Van Gogh wheatfield have been applied, without much preliminary drawing work, with powerful brushstrokes in approximately six colour units. Just as with the "study" for, or after, the self-portrait, it was a reproduction and not an original that Leonhard Wacker had in front of him as he painted the canvas. He may have had at his disposal either printed or handwritten details of the colours of the original (De la Faille no. 628). The colours of the Wacker study have nothing to do with Van Gogh's original colours.2

On the other hand, various forgeries hitherto attributed to Wacker seem not to have been commissioned by him, although he may possibly have been involved in their sale. The still life Vase with asters (€ 590) was already listed in an inventory of the Von der Heydt collection in 1918.3 There is no evidence that Otto Wacker was interested in Van Gogh at that time. Whilst Wacker's name had indeed been mentioned in connection with a forgery after Franz von Stuck as early as 1914, his interest in the art trade during those early years seems to have been confined to promoting the sale of works by his father, an amateur painter. As to the point in time when Wacker actually began his career as a professional art dealer, there are several differing accounts. Without indicating his source, Walter Feilchenfeldt writes: 'Otto Wacker had tried various professions before becoming an art dealer in 1925. He succeeded in establishing a sound reputation with dealers and experts in the Van Gogh field, and De la Faille and Meier-Graefe constantly stressed their faith in his integrity.'4 Grete Ring, one of Paul Cassirer's closest business partners, puts the time much earlier: 'One day, a youthful dancer, Olindo Lewald [sic], alias Otto Wacker, the son of a Düsseldorf painter, made his appearance in the Berlin art trade. At first – it was around 1912 – he offered relatively small-deal-

1 Cf F 617 JH 1753, F 618 JH 1773, and F 619 JH 1792.
ers comparatively modest pieces, works of the Dutch and Düsseldorf schools, and sometimes major works, an Israëls, an Achenbach, Schuch, Uhde, Trübner, ... at the turn of the year 1925/26, W. suddenly appeared with a number of paintings by Vincent van Gogh, which he sold, one after the other, to Berlin art dealers, ... at the end of 1926, W. moved into an imposing bel'étage in one of the most elegant pre-war houses in Viktoriastraße.5

The year 1922 does in fact seem a little too early, as Otto Wacker, alias Olindo Lowael, was still performing as a dancer in his native city of Düsseldorf in the winter of 1923/24.6 During the appeal proceedings Wacker himself is quoted as saying: ‘I gave up dancing around 1924, as my business with the Van Gogh pictures was expanding excessively.’7 Wacker terminated his interest in Krakowski’s hackney carriage business in 1925.8 However, there is no evidence that he was already dealing in art in 1918, this being the year in which Vase with asters, attributed to Wacker himself, is first documented.


mentioned paintings *Vase with asters* and *Peasant walking along the fields* there were no such originals in existence. The Wuppertal painting *Vase with asters* (F 590) is a free adaptation of the motifs of the *Sunflower* series, the sunflowers having been replaced by white and pink asters against a yellow background. It seems unlikely, however, that a direct copy was made after one of the five comparable *Sunflower* versions or after one of the reproductions of these paintings, as the dark upper half of the vase and the shadow cast by the vase do not appear on any of them.

The *Peasant walking along the fields* (fig. 3a) and the *Peasant with fork* are paraphrases of Van Gogh’s Millet interpretation *Morning: Peasant couple going to work (after Millet)* (fig. 3b). Finally, The *small garden* cites the upper left corner of *Garden with flowers* (F 578 JH 1538), leaving out the church as well as the larger house in the original; it is thus a pastiche. In this case also no direct original exists.

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7 Berliner Börsenkurier (6 April 1932). ‘Etwa im Jahre 1924 habe ich das Tanzen aufgegeben, da sich mein Kunsthandel mit den van Gogh-Bildern zu sehr ausdehnte.’
9 When the estate of Julius Schmitt’s widow was auctioned by Auktionshaus Lempertz, Cologne, in May 1955, this painting was no longer in the collection.
10 Cf. details of provenance given in De la Faille.
11 According the Von der Heydt-Museum, no records of the time and place of purchase have been preserved.
12 The painting was exhibited in 1923 in Manchester at Thos. Agnew & Sons, *Masterpieces of French art of the 19th century in aid of the Lord Mayor’s appeal for the hospitals*, no. 20.
13 London (Christie’s), 29 April 1927, lot 44.
14 That this work was among the paintings sold by Otto Wacker is documented by a contemporary photograph of the courtroom during the Wacker trial in which the painting is clearly visible as one of the pieces of evidence.
15 Provenance according to auction catalogue.
17 This is particularly clear from the rendering of the wooden clogs, the right arms and hands of the figures and the background. As only the man’s right hand is visible in the original painting, the forger did not have a depiction of a left hand at his disposal. He therefore had to conceal it under the peasant woman’s apron.
Catalogue

The following catalogue is based on several sources, some of which have never before been evaluated in connection with the Wacker forgeries. In addition to the details of provenance given in the 1928, 1938 and 1970 editions of De la Faille's catalogue raisonné (a work which must, however, be treated with some caution) and the studies by Walter Feilchenfeldt (1988/89), these sources consist primarily of the records kept at the Zentralarchiv der Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin. In January 1979, Ludwig Justi exhibited the Kröller-Müller collection at the Nationalgalerie, Berlin. He also exhibited, by way of comparison, several Wacker forgeries, keeping a further selection in his office for viewing by arrangement. The correspondence with the then-owners of these works has been preserved, though it has not been possible to match the works and their owners in every case. Letters were evidently written to Carl Sternheim of Uttwil, near Zurich, and Thomas Brown, Viktoriaweg 55, Berlin, as owners of non-authentic works, but it has not been possible to identify their pictures. Marie von Mendelssohn, on the other hand, owned an authentic work – Wheatfield with cypresses (F 717 JH 1758) – which she loaned to the Nationalgalerie for purposes of comparison. The Berlin dealer Paul Glaser made a statement during the trial of the Hamburg collector Elsa Wolf-Essberger against her former picture dealer Hugo Perls, confirming that he and Perls had 'in the course of several years' acquired 'about 8 van Goghs from Wacker.' They had not been taken in commission but bought straight out. Indeed, Perls owned 11 of the Wacker fakes. It was only possible to identify one of them (F 616) as the joint property of Glaser and Perls.

Other names of owners have been sourced from contemporary newspaper and magazine reports on the Wacker affair and the ensuing trial. Reference in these reports to the fact that Wacker sold two works to the Paris and New York-based Wildenstein Gallery could be verified only in the case of one of the paintings (F 527a). No documentary evidence could be found concerning the first owner of the paintings F 559a, F 625a and F 691 named by Wacker himself during his trial. Like Wacker's frequently cited 'Private collection, Switzerland,' they, too, are in all probability fictitious. For this reason, in what follows those provenances for which there is no definitive evidence are stricken through, while those probably invented by Wacker himself are given a question mark.

For the works in public collections, the respective museums have furnished details on their provenances. As regards the only two paintings to have been put up for auction, the auctioneers concerned gave me access to their archives. I am also indebted to Ralph Jentsch, Capri, for having pointed out that the painting F 691 was given by the owner of the Galerie Matthiesen, Franz Zatzenstein, to one of his employees when he was forced to close the gallery due to Nazi rise to power. That employee, Gertrud Wolowski, must have believed the painting to be authentic, as after the Second World War she sometimes referred to it as her 'nest egg.' In 1977, her heirs noticed a label from the Cassirer gallery on the back of the frame, which reads: 'Paul Cassirer/Van Gogh/Ausstellung/1928.' Walter Feilchenfeldt believes that this painting, together with F 418a, F 527a and F 625a, are the four works lent by Wacker to the Van Gogh exhibition at the Galerie Paul Cassirer that first aroused suspicion and therefore began the whole Wacker affair.

18 Walter Feilchenfeldt (with Han Veenenbos), Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cassirer, Berlin: the reception of Van Gogh in Germany from 1901 to 1914, Zwolle 1988, and idem, op. cit. (note 4).
19 Zentralschv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Actae NG 1723, NG U/1723. I wish to thank Jönn Grabowski and Petra Ebinger for their assistance and information.
20 I wish to thank Kristian Müller-Oden, Berlin, for having pointed out that, contrary to the information in De la Faille, not all these works were shown to the public.
21 Brown's address was the same as that of Paul Cassirer's gallery. However, according to Walter Feilchenfeldt, Zurich, who manages the gallery's archive, the addressee cannot be identified.
22 She acknowledged receipt of the returned painting on 30 November 1932.
23 I wish to thank Monique Hageman and Freke Pabst, Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum); Martha op de Coul, The Hague (Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie); Tsukasa Ködera, Takarazuka/Japan; Ann Hoogswald, Washington (National Gallery of Art); Sabine Feihm and Udo Garweg, Wuppertal (Von der Heydt-Museum); and the Thannhauser Estate, Geneva.
24 I wish to thank Claudia Herreng (1), Selen Nassery (Sotheby's, Frankfurt) and Alexandra Kindermann (Christie's, London).
A
Works probably painted by Leonhard Wacker

F 385 / H 812 / FF 1 / JH -
Self-portrait
Oil on canvas, 41 x 32.5 cm
Copy after F 386 / H 1365 (Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo)
The forger misinterpreted the potatoes in the authentic painting as bread rolls.

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Matthiesen, Berlin (1929)
Willem Scherjon, Utrecht (1932)
Max Silberberg, Breslau
Salomon van Deventer, Wassenaar-De Steeg (1970)
Heirs of Salomon van Deventer, Wassenaar-De Steeg
Private collection (2002)

Exhibitions
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - ?), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

F 387 / H - / FF 5 / JH -
Plate with bread rolls
Oil on canvas, 46 x 57 cm
Copy after F 386 / H 1365 (Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo)
The forger misinterpreted the potatoes in the authentic painting as bread rolls.

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Matthiesen, Berlin (1929)
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - ?), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

F 418 / H 814 / FF 7 / JH -
Boats at Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer
Oil on canvas, 44 x 57.5 cm
Copy after F 1430 / H 1505 (Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1928 Berlin, Galerie Paul Cassirer (15 January - 1 March), Vincent van Gogh, no 42 ('Berlin owner')

F 418a / H - / FF 55 / JH -
Boats at Les-Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer
Oil on canvas, 46 x 57 cm
Copy after F 1430 / H 1505 (Nationalgalerie, Berlin)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Private collection, Switzerland (1928)
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1928 Berlin, Galerie Paul Cassirer (15 January - 1 March), Vincent van Gogh, no 42 ('Berlin owner')

1929 Hamburg, Kunstverein (February - March?), Vincent van Gogh - Sammlung Knoller im Haag, no 85
1930 Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum (16 September - 2 November), Vincent van Gogh en zijn tijdgenoten, no 223
1949 Gouda, Het Catharina Geitthus (April - May), Vincent van Gogh
F 521 / H - / FF 12 / JH -
Self-portrait
Oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm
Copy after F 522 JH 1266 (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin
Sir Robert Abdy, Paris
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1927 Galerie Matthiesen (February - March), Das Stillleben in der Deutschen und Französischen Malerei von 1830 bis zur Gegenwart, no 118

F 523 / H 813 / FF 14 / JH -
Self-portrait with easel
Oil on canvas, 59 x 49 cm
Copy after F 426 JH 1770 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC) and F 522 JH 1266 (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Joseph Strasaky Gallery (1927: acquired for 80,000 guilders)
Chester Dale, New York (1929)
National Gallery of Art, Washington (Chester Dale Collection)
(Inv no 1965 inv. no 1814)

Exhibitions
1929 Utrecht, Vereeniging voor der Kunst (May - June), Vincent van Gogh

F 539 / H - / FF 16 / JH -
The zouave
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm
Copy after F 424 JH 1488 (Private collection)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin (1927)
Otto Krebs, Holzdorf (1928/1929)
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin (1932) (taken back from Krebs)
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1927 Berlin, Galerie Hugo Perls (January - February), Französische Malerei des XIX Jahrhunderts, no 27
1928 Berlin, Galerie Paul Cassirer (15 January - 1 March), Vincent van Gogh, no 57 ('Holzdorf/Weimar, private collection')

1927 Galerie Matthiesen (February - March), Das Stillleben in der Deutschen und Französischen Malerei von 1830 bis zur Gegenwart, no 118

F 539a / H - / FF 17 / JH -
The zouave
Oil on canvas, 62 x 52 cm
Copy after F 424 JH 1488 (Private collection)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
> Private collection, Switzerland
Whereabouts unknown
Exhibitions
7 1928 Berlin, Galerie M Goldschmidt & Co (February - March), Impressionisten-Sonderausstellung, no 13 ('Mannerportrát')

F 577 / H - / FF 19 / JH -
The garden
Oil on canvas, 43 x 33.5 cm
Copy after F 1456 JH 1537 (Private collection)
Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie M Goldschmidt, Berlin (February - March 1928)
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1928 Berlin, Galerie M Goldschmidt & Co (February - March), Impressionisten-Sonderausstellung, no 16 ('Garten mit Haus,' ill)

Copy after F 638 JH 1797 (The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland)

F 616 / H - / FF 24 / JH -
Cypresses
Oil on canvas, 70 x 56 cm
Copy after F 1525 JH 1747 (The Brooklyn Museum, New York)
Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin ('sold about 1925 for 18,000 Reichsmark')
Galerie Hugo Perl/Paul Glaser, Berlin (joint venture) 1925
Elsa Wolf-Esweber, Hamburg (1928/29)
Mrs Hartung
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January -?), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker
1934 Amsterdam, Kunsthandel H. van de Ven & Co (7 April - 5 May).

Copy after F 735 JH 1761 (Knoedler-Müller Museum, Offenbach)

F 639 / H 817 / FF 26 / JH -
Road with two poplars
Oil on canvas, 55 x 45 cm
Copy after F 638 JH 1797 (The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland)
De la Faille’s financial interest in this painting has been examined by Tsukasa Ködera in idem, ‘The road in the Alpilles new documents concerning the acquisition of the Wacker/Van Gogh,’ in Shigeo Nose, Ryoko (ed) (Symposium on Art), Hiroshima 1999, pp 129-44
Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Heinrich Thannhauser, Berlin

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VAN GOGH MUSEUM

Galerie Huisk & Scherjon, Amsterdam (acquired from Wacker on 12 December 1928)
J-B de la Faille, Bloemendaal (acquired from the above on 25 September 1935 for 14,550 guilders)
Majinaburo Ohara, Kurashiki/Japan (purchased through J-B de la Faille)
Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki/Japan (since 1940)

Exhibitions
1927 Berlin, Galerie Heinrich Thannhauser (9 January - mid-February), Erste Sonderausstellung der Berlin (not in catalogue)
1927 Paris, Galerie Bernheim-Jeune, Vincent van Gogh l’époque française (20 June - 2 July)
1932 Amsterdam, E.J van Wisselingh & Co (27 April - 28 May), Hollandsche en Fransche schilderkunst der XIXe en XXe eeuw, no 22

F 681a / H- / FF 57 / JH -
Vase with roses
Oil on canvas, 88.5 x 68.5 cm
Copy after F 682 JH '1979 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Annenberg Collection, New York)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
7 Private collection, Switzerland (1928)
Whereabouts unknown

F 685 / H- / FF 28 / JH -
Peasant with fork (after Millet)
Oil on canvas, 57 x 47.5 cm
Partial copy after F 684 JH '1880 (Otto Edels Collection, at present St Petersburg, Hermitage)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin (1928)
Galerie Goldschmidt, Berlin (1928/29)
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1928 Berlin, Galerie M. Goldschmidt & Co. (February-March), Impressionisten-Sonderausstellung, no. 15 (‘Retour des champs’)
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - 2), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

F 691 / H- / FF 30 / JH -
Sower
Oil on canvas, 74.5 x 59 cm
Copy after F 689 JH '1886 (Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo)

Provenance
Karl Ernst Sthaus, Nagan
7 Private collection, Switzerland
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1928 Berlin, Galerie Paul Cassier (15 January - 1 March), Vincent van Gogh, no. 73 (‘Berlin, privately owned’)

F 705 / H- / FF 32 / JH -
Sower
Oil on canvas, 48 x 62 cm
Copy after F 1442 JH '1908 (The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum/Thannhauser Collection, New York) or F 1422 JH '1470 (Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
7 Galerie M. Goldschmidt & Co., Berlin (1928)
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin (1929)
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1928 Berlin, Galerie M. Goldschmidt & Co. (February-March), Impressionisten-Sonderausstellung, no. 14 (‘Samann’)
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - 2), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

F 710a / H- / FF 35 / JH -
Olive trees
Oil on canvas, 72 x 91 cm
Copy after F 710 JH '1856 (The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis)

Provenance
Karl Ernst Sthaus, Nagcn
7 Private collection, Switzerland
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Matthiesen, Berlin (1928)
**JOURNAL 2002**

When the New York owners consigned the painting for sale at Sotheby’s in 1964, the auctioneers enquired about its status with the editorial board of the new De la Faille edition. They received a negative reply and the work was not accepted for the sale.

**Provenance**
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie M. Goldschmidt, Berlin (1928)
Mrs F., Zurich (1929)
Mr & Mrs Shepard Ashman Morgan, New York (1929/64)

Curtailed for sale at Sotheby’s, New York, 8 April 1964 (not catalogued, withdrawn prior to auction)
Whereabouts unknown

**Exhibitions**
1928 Berlin, Galerie M. Goldschmidt & Co (February - March), Impressionisten-Sonderausstellung, no 20 (‘Olivenhain’)
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - 7), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

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**F 715a / H - / FF 37 / JH -**

**Olive trees**
Oil on canvas, 72 x 91 cm
Copy after F 710 JH 1856 (The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis)

**Provenance**
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Mrs F., Zurich (1929)

Exhibited for sale at Sotheby’s, New York, 8 April 1964 (not catalogued, withdrawn prior to auction)
Whereabouts unknown

**Exhibitions**
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - 7), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

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**F 713 / H - / FF 34 / JH -**

**Olive trees**
Oil on canvas, 55 x 65 cm
Copy after F 710 JH 1856 (The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis)

**Provenance**
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin
Galerie Commeter, Hamburg
Galerie Sigmund Gildemeister, Hamburg-Altona (1928/1929/1932)

Whereabouts unknown

**Exhibitions**
1927 Berlin, Galerie Hugo Perls (January - February), Französische Malerei des XIX Jahrhunderts, no 10
1928 Berlin, Galerie Paul Cassirer (15 January - 1 March), Vincent van Gogh, no 79 (‘Cuban, privately owned’)

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**F 725a / H - / FF 37 / JH -**

**Landscape**
Oil on canvas, 63 x 53 cm
Copy after F 710 JH 1856 (The Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis)

**Provenance**
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin

Exhibited for sale at Sotheby’s, New York, 8 April 1964 (not catalogued, withdrawn prior to auction)
Whereabouts unknown

**Exhibitions**
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - 7), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

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**F 729 / H - / FF 38 / JH -**

**Landscape**
Oil on canvas, 63 x 53 cm
Partial copy after F 717 JH 1756 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

**Provenance**
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Matthiesen, Berlin
Detroit Institute of Arts (1929/1932)

Whereabouts unknown

**Exhibitions**
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - 7), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

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**F 735 / H 815 / FF 41 / JH -**

**Wheatfield with rising moon**
Oil on canvas, 56 x 87 cm
Copy after F 735 JH 1761 (Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo)

**Provenance**
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin

Whereabouts unknown

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**F 741 / H - / FF 44 / JH -**

**Cypresses**
Oil on canvas, 74 x 58 cm
Partial copy after F 1540 JH 1732 (Kunsthalle, Bremen)

**Provenance**
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin (1927/1928)
Dr Alexander Lewin, Guben (1928/1929)

Whereabouts unknown

**Exhibitions**
1927 Berlin, Galerie Hugo Perls (January - February), Karlsruher Museum des XVIII Jahrhunderts, no 30
1928 Berlin, Galerie Paul Cassirer (15 January - 1 March), Vincent van Gogh, no 79 (‘Cuban, privately owned’)

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F 741a / H - / FF 60 / JH -
Cypresses
Oil on canvas, 74 x 58 cm
Copy after F 742 JH 1742 (The Art Institute of Chicago)

Provenance
Cäcilie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin (February - March 1928)
Private collection, Switzerland (1928)
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1928 Berlin, Galerie M Goldschmidt & Co (February - March), Impressionisten-Sonderausstellung, no 21
('Zwei Zypressen (Z Teil Zirbeln),' ill)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie M Goldschmidt, Berlin (February - March 1928)
Private collection, Switzerland (1928)
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1928 Berlin, Galerie M Goldschmidt & Co (February - March), Impressionisten-Sonderausstellung, no 19 ('Le champ de blé')

F 813 / H - / FF 47 / JH -
The plain at Auvers
Oil on canvas, 70 x 53 cm
Copy after F 781 JH 2103 (Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, Pittsburgh)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin (1928)
Siegbert Stern, Neubabelsberg-Nicolasee
Whereabouts unknown

Exhibitions
1927 Berlin, Galerie Hugo Perls (January - February), Französische Malerei des XIX Jahrhunderts, no 28
1929 Berlin, Nationalgalerie (January - 7), dubious Van Gogh paintings from the Galerie Otto Wacker

F 812 / H - / FF 46 / JH -
The plain at Auvers
Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
Copy after F 781 JH 2103 (Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, Pittsburgh)

Both the editors of the 1970 edition of De la Faille’s catalogue raisonné and Jan Hulsker in his 1996 edition accepted the work as authentic. The Phillips Collection in Washington, which both the editors of De la Faille 1970 and Hulsker name as the whereabouts of the painting, confirmed in 1998 that ‘there are no records of this work ever being in our collection.’

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin (1927/28)
Galerie E J van Wisselingh & Co, Amsterdam (April 1928)
Whereabouts unknown

F 824 / H - / FF 51 / JH -
Wheatfield with a tree
Oil on canvas, 41 x 79 cm
Partial copy after F 807 JH 1980 (Mellon Collection, Upperville/VA)

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Galerie Hugo Perls, Berlin (1927/28)
Galerie E J van Wisselingh & Co, Amsterdam (April 1928)
Whereabouts unknown
Exhibitions
1927 Berlin, Galerie Hugo Perls (January - February), "Französische Malerei des XIX. Jahrhunderts", no. 31
1928 Amsterdam, E. J. van Wisselingh & Co. (16 April - 5 May), "Cent ans de peinture française", no. 35

FF 64
Wheatfield with reaper
Oil on canvas
Found by the police in Leonhard Wacker’s studio

Provenance
Galerie Otto Wacker, Berlin
Nationalgalerie Berlin (in storage)

Sale Christie’s, London, 29 April 1927, lot 44 (sold for 'dxxx gns,' according to a handwritten remark in the copy of the auction catalogue in the Christie’s archive)

F 590 / H - / FF 86 / JH -
Vase with asters
Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 42.5 cm

Provenance
Galerie Eugene Blot, Paris
Auguste Baron von der Heydt, Elberfeld
Eduard Baron von der Heydt, Zandvoort
Centrermuseum, The Hague (sold by Eduard von der Heydt)
Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal (Gift of Eduard von der Heydt, 1952 (Inv no. 675))

Exhibitions
1923 Manchester, Thos. Agnew & Sons, "Masterpieces of French art of the 19th century in aid of the Lord Mayor’s appeal for the hospitals", no. 20
1926 Tate Gallery (June - October), "List of loans at the opening exhibition of the Modern Foreign Gallery", p. 7

Exhibitions
1925 Elberfeld (7)

F 442 / H - / FF 117 / JH -
The small garden
Oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm

The 1925 Elberfeld exhibition cited by De la Faille might have been "Kunst und Kunstgewerbe des 17 - 19. Jahrhunderts", which took place in the Stadisches Museum Elberfeld in 1925. But as no catalogue was published and no documents referring to that exhibition have survived, there is no definitive evidence

Provenance
Galerie Eugene Blot, Paris (1912)
Mrs. Jakob Schmitz, Elberfeld (1925)
Daniel L. Widener, Panama/New York

Exhibitions
1925 Elberfeld (7)

Works probably not painted by Leonhard Wacker

F 325 / H - / FF 86 / JH -
Vase with flowers
Oil on canvas, 41 x 33.5 cm

Provenance
Galerie Eisenloeffel, Amsterdam
Rainer Art Gallery, London
The French Gallery, London
James Murray, London

The 1925 Elberfeld exhibition cited by De la Faille might have been "Kunst und Kunstgewerbe des 17 - 19. Jahrhunderts", which took place in the Stadisches Museum Elberfeld in 1925. But as no catalogue was published and no documents referring to that exhibition have survived, there is no definitive evidence

Provenance
Galerie Eugene Blot, Paris (1912)
Mrs. Jakob Schmitz, Elberfeld (1925)
Daniel L. Widener, Panama/New York

Exhibitions
1925 Elberfeld (7)

Edouard Manet
The jetty of Boulogne-sur-Mer 1868
Catalogue of acquisitions: paintings and drawings
August 2001 – July 2002

This catalogue contains the paintings and drawings acquired by the Van Gogh Museum from August 2001 to July 2002. Each work has an inventory number made up as follows: the first letter stands for the technique (s = painting, d = drawing); this is followed by a reference number and then by a capital letter (B = loan, X = State of the Netherlands, S = Van Gogh Museum [after 1 July 1994], V = Vincent van Gogh Foundation) and the year of acquisition.

Paintings

Manet, Édouard
French 1832–1883

The jetty of Boulogne-sur-Mer 1868
Oil on canvas, 59.9 x 73.3 cm
Signed at lower right (on the buoy): Manet s 507 5/2002

Manet’s reputation as a painter of seascapes was established in 1864, when he produced his first great essays in the genre at Boulogne-sur-Mer, near Calais. Although his seascapes were innovative from the outset, he subsequently neglected the subject, not tackling it again until the summer of 1868 when he returned to the same seaside resort whose popularity with the Parisian beau monde had considerably increased in the meantime. The artist recorded his impressions in a sketchbook, which he then used in his hotel room – or later in his Paris studio – to compose a range of harbour views, beach scenes and seascapes.

This group includes The jetty of Boulogne-sur-Mer – the first painting by Manet in the Van Gogh Museum’s collection. The central motif is formed by the two jetties at the mouth of the Liane, which gave access to Boulogne harbour further along the river. Were one to compare the painted scene to the site itself, the direction of view would be to the south, with the eastern jetty in the foreground and the coast invisible to the left.

The figures leaning over the railing are admiring a pleasure craft located between the two jetties, which partially obscure its form. The silhouette of the hull is just visible through the timber supports, revealing the boat to be relatively low and small, with a forward-pointing bowsprit. It is most probably a centreboard, a type of vessel developed in America around 1840. The boat is clearly moored, as the gaff is somewhat lowered and the boom raised – the standard method for drying sails without catching too much wind.

The jetty of Boulogne-sur-Mer appears to have been painted over an earlier picture, partially revealed with the aid of raking light, infrared reflectography and radiography. It was probably a seascape with a lighthouse and ships, painted with the canvas rotated 90 degrees to the right. This first work was originally larger; at some point, however, the canvas was cut down to its current format and relined. It was then transferred to a so-called "figure 20" stretcher, measuring 73 x 80 cm. Manet probably intended to work further on the remaining portion of the original picture, as he had done with such works as The waitress (London, National Gallery) and In the café (Winterthur, Sammlung Oskar Reinhart), but nothing ever came of this.

The build-up of the painting now visible is complex and will only be precisely understood following detailed technical examination. However, we can be fairly certain it was painted in several sessions. The boats to the left were part of the initial composition. They were originally accompanied by a moderately large sailing boat at the far right, which the artist subsequently painted out. It is difficult to tell if the foremost jetty formed part of the first design, but the rear jetty definitely appears to have been an afterthought, as the artist painted both it and the sailing ship to the right over the sea. Clearly, Manet could never resist making small changes, and this becomes obvious when we look at the edges of the canvas. At some time during the painting process, when he had already executed the foreground pier, he covered these edges with brown paper, as was usual for relined canvases. Apparently, the artist regarded his work as finished at this point, but he later returned to it, making various new amendments whereby he painted over the tape. In composing the scene Manet made use of his drawings; these sometimes served as mere aides-mémoires but were occasionally literally copied. The wooden jetty in the foreground, for example, is
simply inspired by the artist’s previous sketches of the motif (fig. 1), as is the group of people against the railings at the rear, while the man with the telescope (fig. 2), the girl with the straw hat in the centre and the woman with a parasol at the far right (figs. 3 and 4) have been lifted in their entirety from the pages of a sketchbook. The latter figure also appears in a beach scene painted in the same period (Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts).

Although there are no known drawings of the boat in the centre, it is not inconceivable that these once existed.

The charm of the painting lies to a large extent in Manet’s treatment of the main motif, the two jetties. The artist has painted these horizontally across the canvas, a simple yet bold presentation of the subject that he undoubtedly derived from Japanese prints, which often feature such horizontal compositions (fig. 4). The spatial distribution of the other elements also suggests Manet drew his inspiration from this recently discovered source.

While the foreground jetty is depicted at eye level, the rear jetty is viewed from a raised viewpoint, as is the horizon, indicating that Manet preferred a stage-like arrangement of fore- and background to correct perspective, a choice undoubtedly influenced by Japanese models.

In the foremost jetty Manet also introduced an almost whimsical effect with the rhythmic repetition of the crossed supports. This was based on his drawings of the motif, in which the promenade jetty is depicted from an angle (fig. 1). In the painting, however, this element is presented frontally, creating an entirely artificial impression. This shows that in composing his picture Manet was guided principally by pictorial considerations. His objective was to achieve a kind of ‘constructed’ naturalness, which is why all attempts to understand The jetty of Boulogne-sur-Mer as a faithful rendering of the actual location are doomed to failure. As such the painting can be usefully compared with two other works of the same period, On the beach of Boulogne-sur-Mer (Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts) and Moon above the harbour of Boulogne-sur-Mer (Paris, Musée d’Orsay), which were also assembled from drawings.

Although the painting’s power lies chiefly in Manet’s representation of the jetty, certain details also claim our attention. The northern area of sea is finely rendered in the artist’s distinctive blue-green, while the figures leaning forwards in the centre are confidently depicted with just a few fluent brushstrokes, as are the boats in the background – demonstrations of Manet’s virtuosity as a painter. The work is both detailed and schematic, and, as far as the composition is concerned, the interplay of horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines is particularly sophisticated.

Manet’s horizontal representation of the jetty creates a virtually symmetrical picture, but the artist has countered any suggestion of monotony with a number of clever devices, such as the introduction of subtle variations in his depiction of the figures. The man in dark clothing with a telescope to the left is shown from the side; the woman and the boy are presented frontally; while the group in the centre is viewed from the back. Manet also offsets the uniformity of the railings on the foremost jetty by representing the standards of the rear railings in a fine yet actually illogical rhythm of light and dark tones. In order to prevent this effect from itself becoming symmetrical and thus tedious, he limited his use of it to the left and centre of the jetty – accepting that to the right only the railings on one side could be seen, as with the railings in the background. He also made the boat to the right dark in colour, in order to counterbalance the light-coloured vessels to the left, while the jetty in the foreground only casts a shadow on the water on one side.

In 1873 Manet sold The jetty of Boulogne-sur-Mer for 500 francs to the Paris art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. It was subsequently acquired by Félix Gérard, another dealer, who in 1884 loaned it to the Manet retrospective at the École des Beaux-Arts, where it was hung above the famous painting...
Edouard Manet, Young woman with a parasol, 1868, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins

fig. 5
Utagawa Hiroshige, Miyako: the great Sanbô bridge, Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, gift of the Tôkyô Shimbun

Provenance
Acquired from Manet in 1873 by Paul Durand-Ruel for 500 francs, sold to Felix Gerard before 1884 in 1904 purchased by Oscar Schmitz, in 1936 sold to Wildenstein, Paris, sometime between 1951-55 bought by Jacques Guérlain, subsequently entered an anonymous private collection, acquired by the Van Gogh Museum through Giraud-Pissarro-Segalot (Paris and New York) with funds provided by the SponsorBingo Lottery, the Vereniging Rembrandt (supported by the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds), the VSB Foundation, the Mondriaan Foundation, the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, the Rabobank and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

Notes
I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Juliet Bareau, without whose help this text could not have been written – Louis van Tilborgh

fig. 6
Godet, photograph of the Exposition des œuvres d’Edouard Manet in 1884, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes

1 It is possible that Manet had known Boulogne even before this. Ronald Pickvance has suggested it was the favourite holiday resort of Manet’s parents, see exhib cat. Edouard Manet, Martigny (Fondation Pierre Gianadda) 1996, p. 223, no. 25

2 Boulogne boasted easy accessibility, with a direct train line from Paris to Calais that was extended to Boulogne itself in 1867, see Theodore Reff, exhib cat. Manet and modern Paris, 100 paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs by Manet and his contemporaries, Washington (National Gallery of Art) 1982, pp. 152-53

In 1871 Manet would again stay in Boulogne, where he painted The croquet match (Denis Rouart and Daniel Wildenstein, Edouard Manet catalogue raisonné, 2 vols., Lausanne & Paris 1975, vol. 1, no. 173)
3 In Rouart and Wildenstein, op cit (note 2), vol 1, nos 143-50
1869 is the date adduced for this first visit to the seaside resort and thus for The jetty of Boulogne-sur-Mer (no 149). This dating (originally derived from Théodore Duret, Histoire d'Édouard Manet et de son œuvre, Paris 1902, p 221, no 116) was subsequently adopted in François Chevré et al, exhib cat: Manet 1832-1883, Paris (Galeries nationales du Grand Palais & New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art) 1983, pp 312-13, no 119, but it is incorrect, as shown by the correspondence included in the catalogue (p 110). For Manet’s correspondence during his 1868 stay see also Juliet Wilson-Bareau, Manet par lui-même: Correspondance de voyages, de moments, de tableaux, d'aventures et d'estampes, Paris 1991, pp 47-49.

4 Before his 1868 stay see also Juliet Wilson-Bareau, Manet par lui-même, op cit (note 3), vol 2, 1, attribute eight paintings to Manet and Wildenstein, op cit (note 2), vol 2, nos 140, 143-44. These works and the drawings mentioned in note 5 have the same format, from which it may be inferred that they all come from the same sketchbook (or drawing pad). Only no 139 is smaller, but it was probably cut down at a later stage. The jetty is also depicted in two watercolours in a sketchbook that has been preserved intact, see Von Lowen and Farbe, cit, ch 11, pp 67-71.


18 A photograph of the installation was first published in Étienne Reveilhac-Niulot, Monet raconté par lui-même, 2 vol, Paris 1926, vol 2, figs 344-46. Félix Laurent Joseph Gérard, who is recorded as the owner of the seascape in exhib cat: Exposition des œuvres d’Édouard Manet, Paris (École nationale des Beaux-Arts) 1884, no 51, also owned another painting by Manet (Rouart and Wildenstein, op cit, (note 2), vol 1, no 360). Gérard had a framers in 1870s, but he was also a marchand de tableaux on his death in 1904 (with thanks to Anne Distel, Paris, Musée d’Orsay).

19 The rest of Gérard’s collection was auctioned in 1905 at the Hôtel Drouot (26-29 March). Apparently the painting was sold separately, although the form of the sale is not known. Horst Bedermann, ‘Die Sammlungen Adolf Rothenthüll und Oscar Schirmer in Dresden,’ in Adolph Popp & Felix Billet, Die Moderne und die Sammler: Französische Kunst in Deutschem Privatbesitz aus dem Kasseler Kunstsammlungen zu Meiningen und historische Städtische Kunstsammlungen zu Frankfurter Privatbesitz, Frankfurt am Main (Städtisches Kunstmuseum und Städtische Galerie) 2001-02, pp 72-73, no 29.

20 Emil Waldmann, Ein Cesamment Europäischer Kunst auf der Internationalen Kunstausstellung in Dresden, Berlin Nach-Nach-Ausstellung, 20 June 1926, quoted in Biedermann, op cit (note 19), p 214. After the failure of negotiations in 1931 Schmitz moved the collection from Dresden to Switzerland, where he also joined his French works to the Kunsthalle in Zurich. See Biedermann, op cit (note 19), pp 221, 233, note 44, and Collection Oskar Schmidt cit (note 19).
Drawings

Bonvin, François

French, 1817–1887

Woman by a stove 1857
Charcoal, 35.0 x 27.9 cm
Signed at lower right. f. Bonvin
Dated at lower left: 1857

d 1114 5/2002

The subjects Francois Bonvin represented in his paintings, drawings and watercolours remained largely consistent from the beginning of his artistic career in the 1840s until his death in 1887. In addition to portraits and still lifes, he principally drew and painted craftsmen and women performing their household tasks. Bonvin derived inspiration for these works from the Dutch and Flemish masters of the 17th century, and 18th-century artists such as Chardin and the Le Nain brothers. Unlike his contemporary Courbet, Bonvin never used a large format or dramatic style for these works, saving him from some of the harsher critiques directed at the realists in general. He was popular with the critics and even received state commissions.

The charcoal drawing Woman by a stove depicts a young woman, seen in profile, stoking up a fire with a pair of bellows. Bonvin has drawn this tranquil scene in a highly subtle manner, particularly the model's clothing with all its folds, the gleaming copper of the saucepan on the stove and the steam rising from the pan against the black background on the left. This dark area is echoed in the foreground by the woman's black skirt. Both elements form a strong contrast with the brightly lit foreground, the woman's white blouse and cap, and the wall behind her to the right. The drawing's serene mood, simple composition and striking chiaroscuro are characteristic of Bonvin's work. Dated 1857, it comes from what is generally considered his best period.

The same model, wearing the same clothing, appears in a black chalk drawing and a watercolour from 1856 (Weisberg, nos. 255-56). She is also shown in profile in these two works, this time while eating. Woman by a stove is the first drawing by Bonvin to enter the Van Gogh Museum's collection.

Previously, the artist was only represented by a painting, Still life with drawing equipment (s 451 M/1992), acquired in 1992.

Marije Vellekoop

Provenance
Commenge, before 1926, Brame, 1926,

Literature
E. Moreau-Nélaton, Bonvin raconté par lui-même, Paris 1927, p 55, fig. 27, G. P. Weisberg, Bonvin, Paris 1979, p 268, no 258

Daubigny, Charles-François

French, 1817–1878

Flock of sheep by moonlight 1859
Charcoal, pen and ink, gouache, 23.2 cm x 51.0 cm
Signed at lower right: Daubigny
D 1115 5/2002

Landscapes by moonlight form a special category in Daubigny's oeuvre. He painted a number of them, particularly at the end of his career, and was represented by a moonlit landscape at every exhibition in which he participated in 1877 and 1878. As in Daubigny's other landscapes, farmers and their livestock, small peasant dwellings or shepherds with flocks of sheep generally populate these scenes. He preferred to paint and draw his evening landscapes in a long, rectangular format, the width of these works being at least twice their height. Daubigny began using this panoramic format in the late 1850s, the period in which he produced our newly acquired drawing.

The drawing shows a vast moonlit plain, across which a shepherd and his flock move from left to right. Two dark-coloured dogs drive the sheep, one bounding around at the far left, the other close behind the shepherd. The man stands out as a dark figure against the misty background; he carries a staff over one shoulder and a coat over the other. The moonlight reflects off the animals' heads and backs. To the right are two small groups of haystacks.

The drawing is executed in charcoal. The contours of the sheep, the shepherd, the haystacks and several major lines in the landscape have been drawn over in pen and black ink. The artist has left areas of the cream-coloured paper blank in rendering the light on the animals' backs, although he uses white gouache to represent the pale moon.

The subject, composition and proportions of this work strongly resemble those of a painting from 1859, which is only known from reproductions. It was Daubigny's first landscape by moonlight, measuring 88.5 x 193 cm, which he exhibited at the Salon of 1859. The artist would again use the same composition in 1877, although in this canvas, Lever de lune à Auvers, now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Arts in Montreal, he set the flock of sheep somewhat further back in the picture plane and placed a row of three haystacks on the right. The format of this painting is 106.5 x 188 cm, making it considerably less elongated than the 1859 work.

The similarities between the drawing and the painting from 1859 on the one hand, and the 1877 painting on the other, suggest that the earlier landscapes were also produced in Auvers-sur-Oise, as the title of the later piece indicates. Daubigny would settle in this little town just outside Paris in 1860.

The Van Gogh Museum’s collection has always included two small sketches by Daubigny that once belonged to Theo and Vincent van Gogh. Thanks to the acquisition of *Flock of sheep by moonlight* the artist is now represented by a finished work that is highly characteristic of his oeuvre.

*Marije Vellekoop*


In 2002 the Van Gogh Museum acquired two drawings of Buddha figures made by the Hague artist Hendricus Jansen for the Museum Mesdag. The drawings are one-to-one cartoons for the wall panels installed above the fireplace in the museum’s period room around 1916. H.W. Mesdag’s private house, now part of the museum, was sold after his death in 1915 to the Bond van Eigenaren van de Nederlandsch-Indische Suiker Ondernemingen (BENISO). This organisation refurbished the painter’s former studio on the first floor, transforming it into a boardroom in Art Nouveau style, the epitome of modern design at the time. Jansen was asked to design both stained-glass windows and three wall panels to hang above the fireplace in the new office.

Hendricus Jansen, who generally signed his work ‘Hendricus,’ was a celebrated painter, much in demand around 1915. He produced both illustrations and monumental decorations, carrying out commissions from the Carnegie Foundation for wall paintings in the Vredespaleis, and from the local authorities of The Hague and Rotterdam for decorations in the municipal theatre and town hall, respectively. Jansen trained at the Haagse Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten. He then moved to Paris, where he found work as an illustrator for periodicals like *Le Chat Noir*, *Le Monde Illustré* and *Echo de Paris*. Back in the Netherlands he continued to produce illustrations for publications such as the *Spectator*. His best-known illustrations were for the 1904 reissue of a medieval work, the so-called *Liedeke van Heer Halewyn*. Jansen, who died in 1921, during his work on the Rotterdam town hall,
is now a virtually forgotten artist. However, at the turn of the last century he was one of the most renowned figures of Dutch symbolism and Jugendstil. Jansen was a close friend of the painter Willem Adriaan van Kuijnenburg (1868-1943).

Maartje de Haan

Provenance Private collection; acquired by the Van Gogh Museum (2002)

Rousseau, Théodore
French, 1812–1867

Lisière du Bas-Bréau, Fontainebleau, winter effect c. 1845?
Charcoal on blue paper, 47.5 x 61.5 cm
Signed at lower left with studio stamp: TH.R d'1112 5/2001

Although he received a traditional artist's training, Théodore Rousseau developed his original approach to landscape by working directly from nature. Even as a student, he went into the countryside in search of motifs. From 1836 onwards Rousseau worked mainly in Barbizon, together with Diaz, Decamps and especially Dupré, with whom he travelled to Les Landes and the Pyrenees in 1844. Rousseau strongly identified with the natural world he painted, making it his goal to depict what he described as 'the soul of the forest.' In 1855 he petitioned the local authorities to protect the forest of Fontainebleau from exploitation. Despite being generally acknowledged as the guiding light of the so-called School of 1830, Rousseau lived in almost unrelenting poverty.

Only after the artist's death did it emerge that he had produced many drawings as well as paintings. The catalogue for the auction of his collection, held a year after his death, lists no fewer than 1200 drawings. Although many of these are associated with paintings, they go beyond the concept of preliminary studies and are works of art in themselves.

According to the inscription on the verso, this large charcoal drawing represents the edge of the woods at Bas-Bréau, in the forest of Fontainebleau. It has been suggested that the work belongs to a series of drawings and oil studies associated with Rousseau's famous painting La forêt en hiver, au coucher de soleil (New York, The Metropolitan Museum). This painting, on which the artist worked from 1846 until his death, shows a clearing in a forest surrounded by dense groups of trees. However, there is such a great contrast between the enclosed character of the painting and the openness of this drawing that any direct relationship between the two seems out of the question. Nevertheless, an indirect connection could be inferred from the similarities in size, drawing material, paper colour and drawing style in this drawing and a work in the Louvre, whose subject strongly resembles that of the painting. Both the large format and paper colour are virtually unique in Rousseau's drawn oeuvre.

The dating of Rousseau's drawings is generally problematic, as they are usually undated, and the drawing style and technique do not lend themselves easily to chronological classification. Neither do the locations depicted offer any assistance, as the artist continually returned to his favourite spots. Nor would any relationship with the painting cited above provide a solution in the case of our drawing, for Rousseau worked on the canvas for more than 20 years. In his catalogue of Rousseau's works, Schulman dates the drawing in the Louvre to circa 1845, a date that could also be applied to the museum's newly acquired drawing, given the similarities between the two works.

Thanks to this acquisition the Van Gogh Museum now owns a drawing by Rousseau as well as a painting. The drawing will be included in the supplement to Michel Schulman's catalogue raisonné.

Marije Vellekoop


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Exhib. cat. Stephen White and Andreas Blühm, with a foreword by Bill Clinton, The photograph and the American Dream, 1840-1940, Amsterdam 2001
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2001–02

Paintings

Cézanne, Paul
French, 1839–1906
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Oil on canvas, 54 x 65 cm
s 237 B/2001
Loan from the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Haan, Meijer Isaac de
Dutch, 1852–1895
Self-portrait c. 1889–91
Oil on canvas, 32.4 x 25.5 cm
s 249 B/2002
Loan from a private collection

Degas, Edgar
French, 1834–1917
Portrait of Elena Carafa c. 1875
Oil on canvas, 69.8 x 54.6 cm
s 247 B/2002
Loan from the National Gallery, London

Roelofs, Albert
Dutch, 1877–1920
Portrait of Jo Reeser Roelofs 1900
Oil on canvas, 158 x 119 cm
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Loan from a private collection

Henri Rouart in front of his factory

Sisley, Alfred

Snow effect at Argenteuil
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