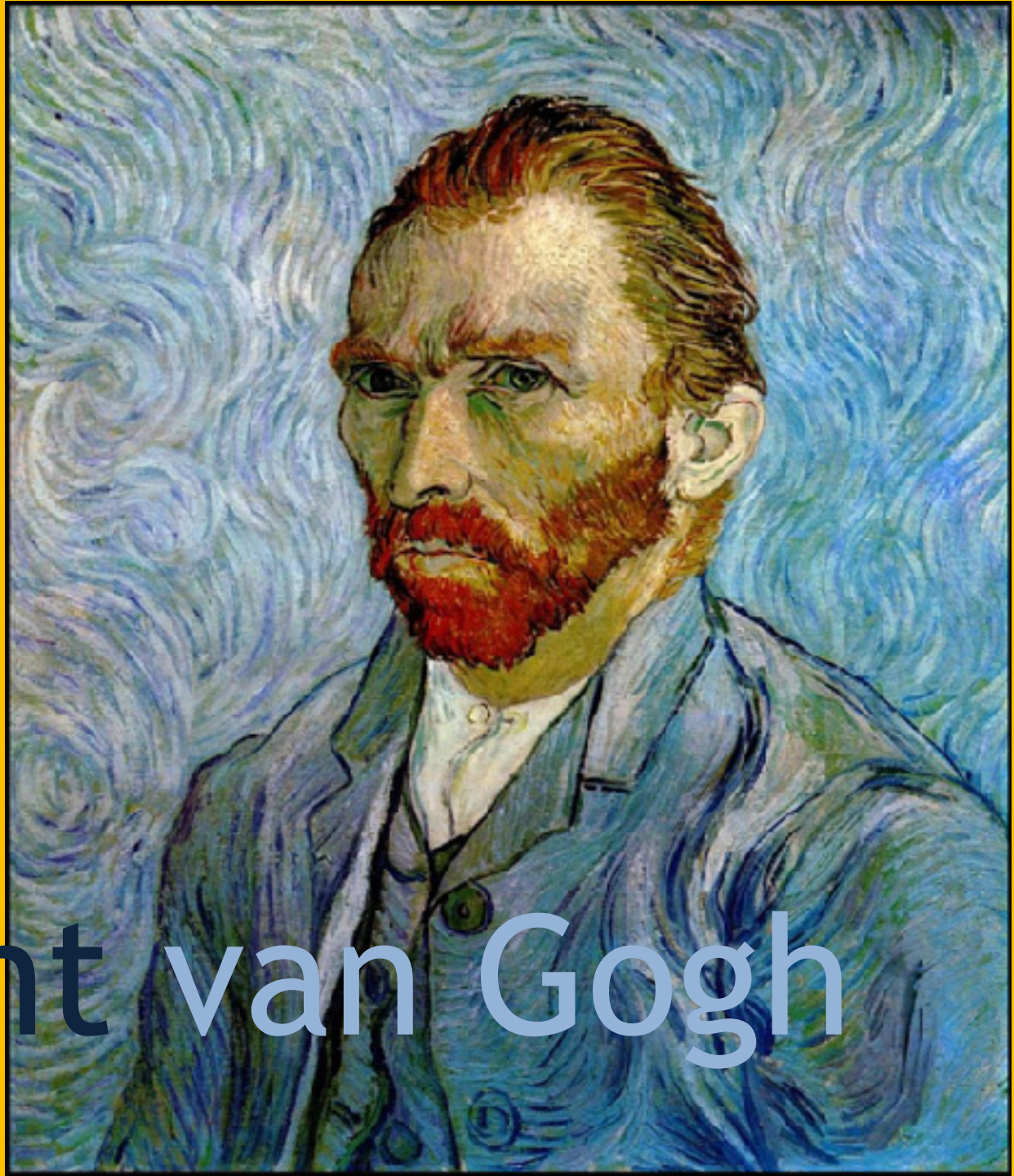


# Vincent van Gogh



# Van Gogh

## 1853-1890

- One of the most original artists ever, Vincent van Gogh worked as an evangelist before taking up painting at the age of 27.
- He was largely self-taught, but absorbed the inspiring lessons of Impressionism during two years in Paris.
- His time in Arles, in the south of France was very productive and it was here that he painted many of his most famous works, all of which he simply signed

Vincent

- His life was a grim and desperate struggle against poverty, hunger, alcoholism and insanity resulting in his suicide at only 37 years of age.
- With such a short artistic career, van Gogh remains one of the most prolific artists in history, leaving behind over 2,000 art works.

# Early life

- Vincent van Gogh was born in 1853 in Holland to a father who was a protestant.
- He was named after his infant brother Vincent who had been delivered still born exactly a year to the day earlier.
- Vincent was a difficult child, but was very close to his brother Theo, with whom he remained close all his life.



Theo van Gogh



- Vincent drew and painted regularly from his early teens and this was encouraged by his mother who was quite artistic herself.
- Vincent's uncle was a successful art dealer in the Dutch capital - The Hague. When Vincent left school his uncle gave him a job and he worked there for four years.
- However in 1874, van Gogh was transferred to London where he fell disastrously in love with his landlady's daughter.
- He was seen to be 'stalking' her and his feelings were such that they were affecting his ability to work and unfortunately he was sacked.

- In 1876 he returned to London, this time as an unpaid assistant in a private school. He was given the job of collecting overdue school fees in some of the city's poorest areas and this first glimpse of real poverty and squalor really distressed him.

- These experiences with poverty awakened a religious zeal in him and he decided to follow in his father's footsteps and become a minister, so after working as an assistant to a minister in London for a few months he returned to London to train fully, however after a few months more he dropped out of his training.
- However, he was still very passionate about helping the poor and at the age of 25 he went to the coal-mining district of Borinage, in southern Belgium to preach as an evangelist.

- The poverty here was even worse than in London so he threw himself into his work with a selfless fervour, interpreting Christ's message 'give to the poor' so literally that he even gave his warm clothes away and ate almost nothing.
- His superiors were so appalled by this 'excessive' zeal and dismayed by his shabby appearance that they felt that he brought disrespect on his calling.
- Once more he was let go.



- He stayed living in Borinage for another two years deciding after this period of time to become an artist.
- He had enjoyed sketching since childhood, especially views of the flat Dutch landscapes, with peasants labouring in the fields, but he had never learned to paint in oils.
- He began to teach himself, but was very conscious of his deficiencies.
- He was keen to meet other artists and took advice from his relative, the painter Anton Mauve, but his personality made it impossible for him to be anybody's pupil.



The Potato Eaters 1885

## Subject Matter

A family group of peasant sharing a meagre meal of potatoes together. There is the feeling that it is the evening and they have just finished a hard day's work.

## Colour

This painting is dark in colour, and this shows the influence of the Dutch masters. Van Gogh uses a lot of blacks and browns which help convey emotion.

## Composition

In this painting van Gogh is using a central composition and there isn't an obvious focal point to the work.

## Brushwork/Technique

Although there is a *stylised* technique visible, the brushwork is smooth, but we see the use of directional mark making.

<http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/vgm/index.jsp?page=1303&lang=en>



## Comparison with Dutch Masters

Frans Hals *'Malle Babbe'* 1633-35



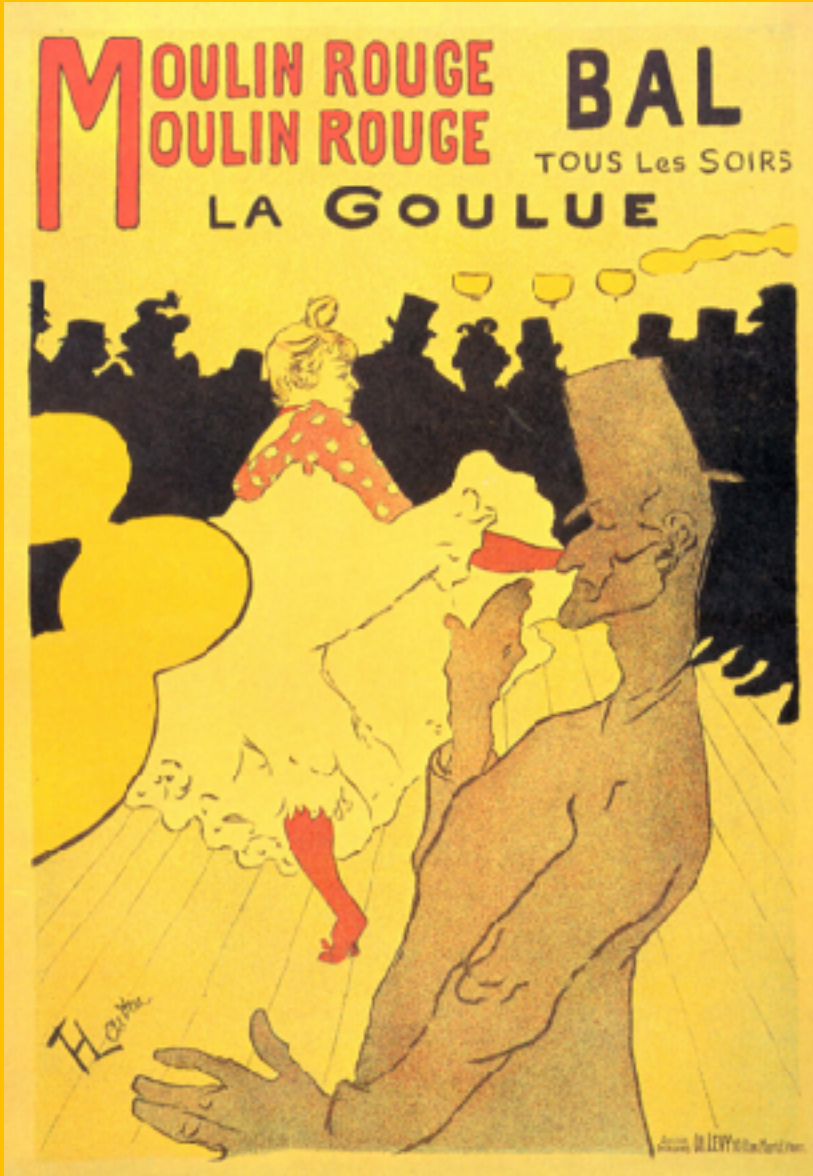
Rembrandt *'Self-Portrait'* 1660

# Moving to Paris

- In 1885 van Gogh left Holland and moved to Paris after a brief time enrolled in the art academy in Antwerp.
- His brother Theo was already living in Paris, working as an art dealer with his uncle's company and Vincent moved into Theo's flat in Montmatre and studied for a couple of months in the studio of an artist called Fernand Cormon, and it was there he met the painter Toulouse-Lautrec.



# Toulouse Lautrec



- Both artists soon broke with Cormon as he was hostile to the new Impressionist movement.
- Van Gogh was inspired by their colour and the habit of painting *en plein air*.
- Through Theo's connections as an art dealer, Vincent met Pissarro and Gauguin.

- But while Vincent's art progressed rapidly, in Paris he stood out like a sore thumb among the other Parisian artists. He was a heavy drinker, had an unpredictable temper, and was incapable of hiding his emotions.
- He even alienated Theo for a while, so after 2 years in Paris he decided to leave declaring:

*"I will take myself off somewhere down south."*

# Moving to Arles

- In February of 1888, Van Gogh decided to move to Arles in Southern France and begin what he called the Studio of the South. His plan for the studio was for it to be an artist colony where artists could work together and inspire each other. As an art dealer, his brother Theo agreed to try to sell their work. Van Gogh rented four rooms in a building on the Place Lamartine in May. This building, known as the "Yellow House," was to be his Studio of the South.



# 'The Yellow House' 1888





# ‘Bedroom at Arles’ 1888





- Having never been this far South before, and as Japanese prints were a big influence to him, Van Gogh saw Arles as a French version of Japan.
- Yellow is a symbol of Friendship  
in Japan, this made van Gogh very happy and he plunged himself into his work.

Willow, cherry Blossoms & Swallows Hiroshige

The Almond Blossom, 1888

*“Ideas are coming to me  
in swarms”*

- In order to help persuade Gauguin to move to the Studio of the South, Theo provided a 250 franc monthly allowance in exchange for one of Gauguin's paintings each month. Vincent began painting sunflowers to decorate Gauguin's bedroom. These sunflowers would later become one of his signature pieces





**The  
Sunflowers  
1888**



- Interestingly Vincent painted two series of paintings of the sunflowers. The first in 1887 whilst in Paris focused on the flowers lying on the ground, while the second was made a year later in Arles and shows bouquets of the flowers in a vase.

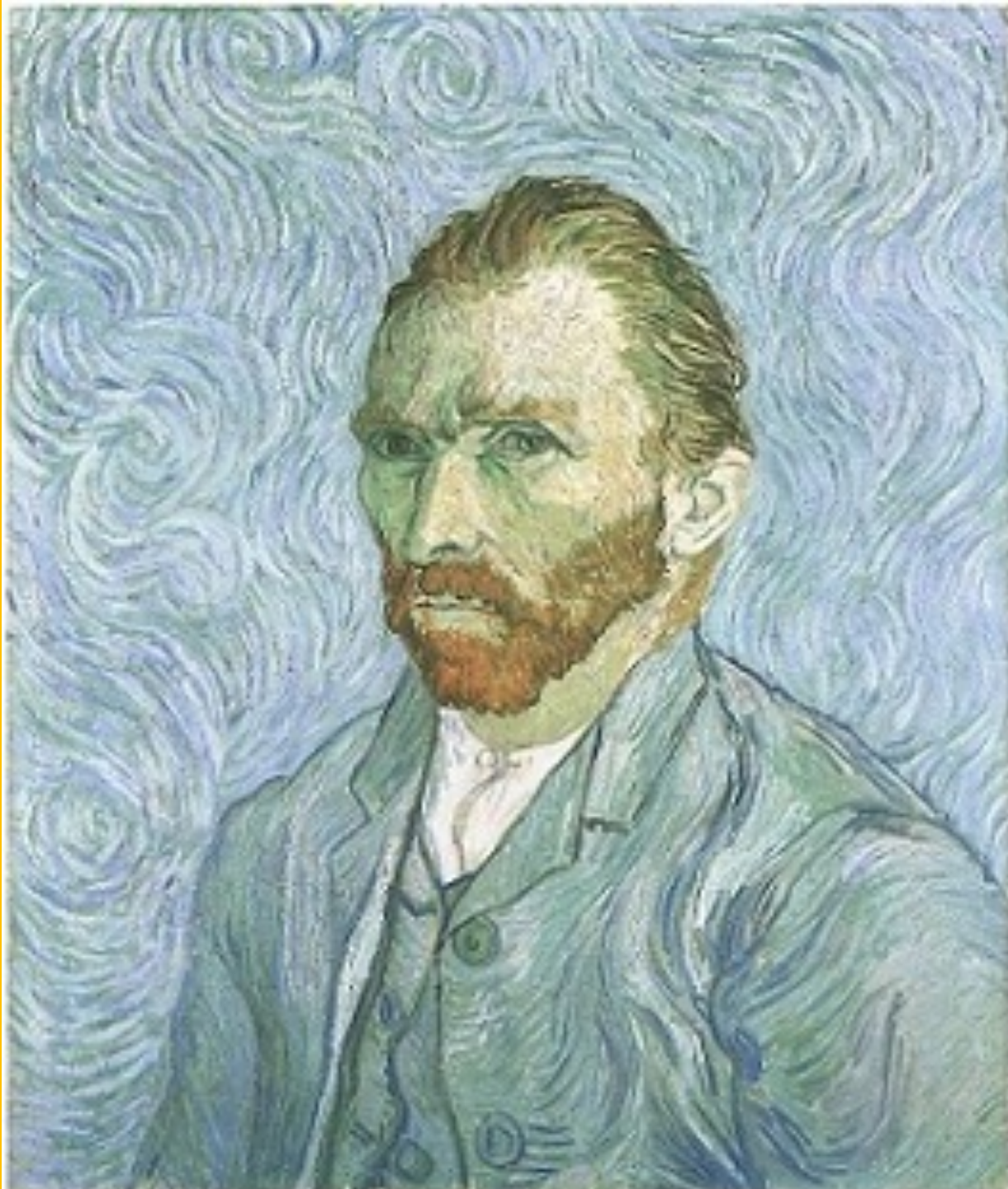


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjnWQtUBAHo>

# Self-Portraits

- Another popular subject matter for van Gogh was the self-portrait.
- He painted more than 30 self-portraits between 1886 and 1889, making him one of the most prolific self-portrait artists of all time.
- A main reason was that he had no money to pay any models.
- Van Gogh did not see portrait painting as merely a means to an end; he also believed that portrait painting would help him develop his skills as an artist.

"I purposely bought a mirror good enough to enable me to work from my image in default of a model, because if I can manage to paint the colouring of my own head, which is not to be done without some difficulty, I shall likewise be able to paint the heads of other good souls, men and women."



'Self-Portrait' 1890



'Self-Portrait'  
1887



'Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear' 1889



# Subject Matter

Van Gogh's Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear is one of his more interesting and popular self-portraits. Painted in January of 1889 just weeks after a portion of Van Gogh's ear was cut off; the portrait shows him from a slight angle in a room of the Yellow House wearing a green overcoat and a fur-lined winter cap. His right ear is bandaged in the portrait though in reality the wound was to his left ear; the discrepancy is due to his painting while looking at a mirror image



## Composition

Van Gogh uses a central composition with a three-quarter face view

### Colour

Greens and blues are the dominant colours in this painting. The strong vibrant green of the coat is contrasted with the paler green of the walls. Van Gogh, in a similar way to Gauguin's Breton paintings uses a strong blue outline around many of the forms. We see evidence of complementary colours in the skin tones which create tone on the face

## Brushwork/Technique

We see van Gogh's distinctive style in this painting. There is strong use of directional mark-making where the lines of the brush effectively model or sculpt the figure out of the thickly laid impasto paint.

# Van Gogh & Colour

- Van Gogh loved colour. In a letter to Theo he explained that by “*exaggerating the colour*” he “*wished to express himself forcibly*”.
- He had a particular preference for the colour yellow and other colours he used heavily were white, purple & blue, using these often to accentuate the power of yellow.



'Café Terrace at Night' 1888





'Yellow Field' 1889

# Crows over wheatfield 1890





- **Vincent Van Gogh was a truly innovative painter in terms of style and technique.** 10  
Discuss this statement using the following headings of subject matter, composition, colour/mood and technique referring to one named self-portrait 20
- and name and discuss 2 of his other famous works 10
- *Illustrate your answer* 10