AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Van Gogh Museum: Masterpieces

Twenty works from the Van Gogh Museum, from a Borinage coal mine and The Potato Eaters to the colour of the French years, with pictures by Gauguin, Bernard, Pissarro, Angrand and Boulanger.



The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam holds a major collection of Vincent van Gogh's paintings, drawings and letters. His career was fairly short, and the pictures show how far he moved within it, from the sombre palette of his Dutch period to the intense colour and charged surfaces of the work he made in France. The letters, now available in a scholarly edition, record much of what he was trying to do.

Most of the works chosen here are Van Gogh's own. They run from an early watercolour of a coal mine in the Borinage and the lamplit table of The Potato Eaters to the blossom, irises and sunflowers of his later years, with a painting of worn shoes along the way and a chalk drawing of a woman picking up a stick among the late works. A few come with circumstances worth knowing: a painting identified as a gift for a newborn nephew, a legend the museum rejects, irises whose colour has shifted since they were painted. The other pictures are by painters who worked very differently: Gauguin's view of Van Gogh at work, a self-portrait by Émile Bernard that includes an image of Gauguin, Pissarro's haymakers at Éragny, Charles Angrand's view of the Seine and Gustave Boulanger's highly finished Phryne. They set Van Gogh's handling beside other approaches to colour and finish, and in Gauguin's case they show him as another painter saw him.

Artline chose these works from the museum's documented holdings, independently of the museum. Dates and attributions keep the qualifications given in the linked records.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/van-gogh-museum

The selection · 20

1. The Potato Eaters
   Vincent van Gogh · 1885
2. Sunflowers
   Vincent van Gogh · January 1889
3. Almond Blossom
   Vincent van Gogh · February 1890
4. Wheatfield with Crows
   Vincent van Gogh · July 1890
5. The Yellow House
   Vincent van Gogh · September 1888
6. Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat
   Vincent van Gogh · September–October 1887
7. Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers
   Paul Gauguin · 1888
8. Gauguin's Armchair
   Vincent van Gogh · 1888
9. The Pink Peach Tree
   Vincent van Gogh · 1888
10. Café Table with Absinthe
    Vincent van Gogh · 1887
11. Phryne
    Gustave Boulanger · 1850
12. The Seine, Morning at Saint-Ouen
    Charles Angrand · 1886
13. Self-Portrait with a Portrait of Gauguin
    Émile Bernard · 1888
14. Haymaking at Éragny
    Camille Pissarro · 1887
15. Woman Picking Up a Stick before Trees
    Vincent van Gogh · 1890
16. Coal Mine in the Borinage
    Vincent van Gogh · 1879
17. The Bedroom
    Vincent van Gogh · October 1888
18. Irises
    Vincent van Gogh · 1890
19. Shoes
    Vincent van Gogh · 1886
20. View of Arles with Irises in the Foreground
    Vincent van Gogh · 1888

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The Potato Eaters

Vincent van Gogh

1885 · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. The Potato Eaters. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Five people sit round a table under a small lamp. The light is poor, the food is simple, and the hands and faces are angular to the point of clumsiness. The clumsiness is part of the point. Van Gogh meant this picture of rural labour to be taken seriously, and he wanted to show people whose lives had been shaped by work without borrowing the manners of polite portraiture.

Object source · Open artwork

02 / 20

Sunflowers

Vincent van Gogh

January 1889 · Oil on canvas · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. Sunflowers. Image credit: Vincent van Gogh; Source credit: Google Arts & Culture — hwEGmsM-FoHAwA. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · Public domain

The difficulty is plain enough: a crowd of yellow flowers held within a narrow range of closely related tones, any of which might merge with its neighbours. Van Gogh keeps them apart by other means. Some stand upright and others droop. Each is at its own stage of growth and turns its own way, and the dark seed heads break up the yellow wherever it threatens to settle into a single mass.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0031V1962

03 / 20

Almond Blossom

Vincent van Gogh

February 1890 · Oil on canvas · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. Almond Blossom. Image credit: Vincent van Gogh; Source credit: dAFXSL9sZ1ulDw at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · Public domain

The museum identifies this painting as a gift for Van Gogh's newborn nephew. There is no trunk and no wider landscape, only branches and the intervals between them. The blue ground gives that intricate network room, and the pale flowers stay distinct against it, so the picture is organised as much by its gaps as by its blossom.

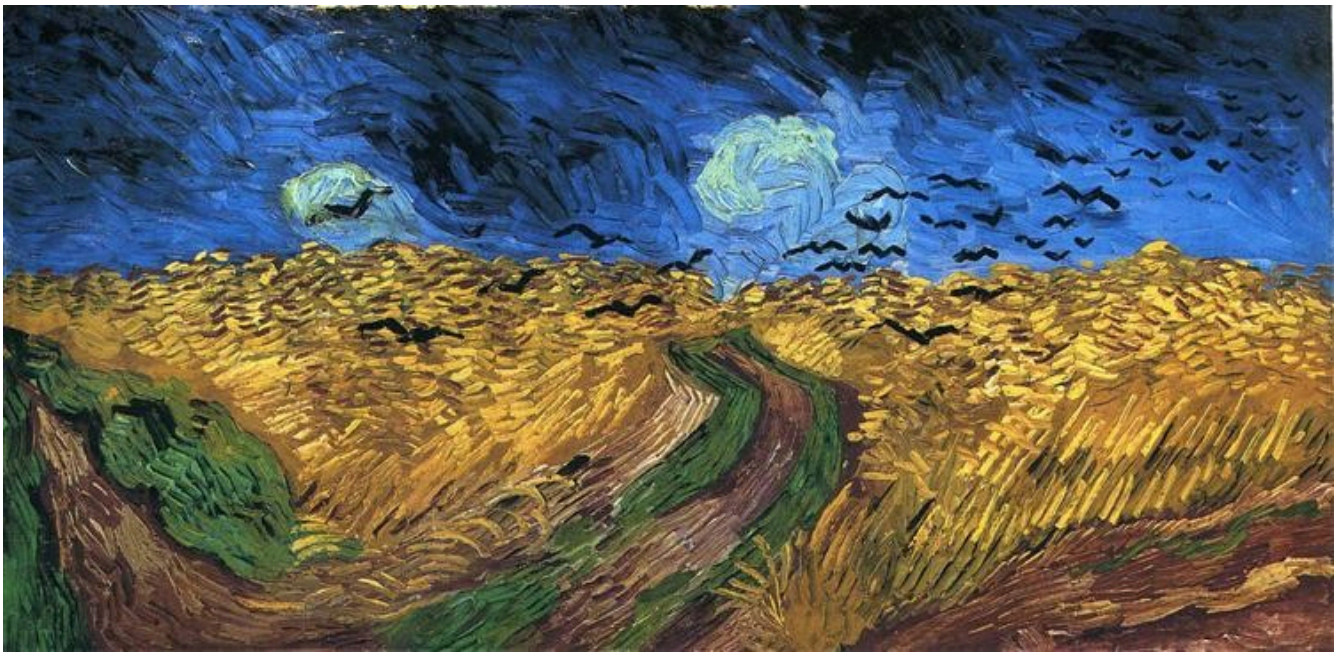
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0176V1962

04 / 20

Wheatfield with Crows

Vincent van Gogh

July 1890 · Oil on canvas · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. Wheatfield with Crows. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A persistent story makes this Van Gogh's final painting. The museum rejects it, and the canvas is unsettling enough without the story's help. Paths lead into the wheat in competing directions, so that none settles as the way in, dark birds cross the sky, and the brushwork stays forceful throughout.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0149V1962

05 / 20

The Yellow House

Vincent van Gogh

September 1888 · Oil on canvas · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. The Yellow House (The Street). Image credit: Vincent van Gogh; Source credit: Van Gogh Museum. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · Public domain

Title and colour both single out the house, yellow against a deep blue sky. Yet the painting does not isolate it. Neighbouring buildings, pedestrians and the open street keep it within a working town, and for all its strength the colour never pushes those ordinary surroundings out of the picture.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0032V1962

06 / 20

Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat

Vincent van Gogh

September–October 1887 · Oil on cotton · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat. Image credit: Vincent van Gogh; Source credit: PgEJ1hPIzqsM2w at Google Cultural Institute maximum zoom level. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · Public domain

Short strokes change direction as they travel round the hat, the face and the clothing. Orange in the beard answers cooler passages nearby, and the space around the head plays its part in describing it too. The likeness is built from these contrasts as much as from the features themselves.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0016V1962

07 / 20

Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers

Paul Gauguin

1888 · Van Gogh Museum



Paul Gauguin. Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Gauguin shows Van Gogh absorbed in his work, the bent arm linking the painter to the sunflowers beside him. The method is Gauguin's own: broad areas of colour, far removed from the short, restless strokes of the Self-Portrait with Grey Felt Hat. It is one artist's interpretation of another, not a neutral record of Van Gogh at work.

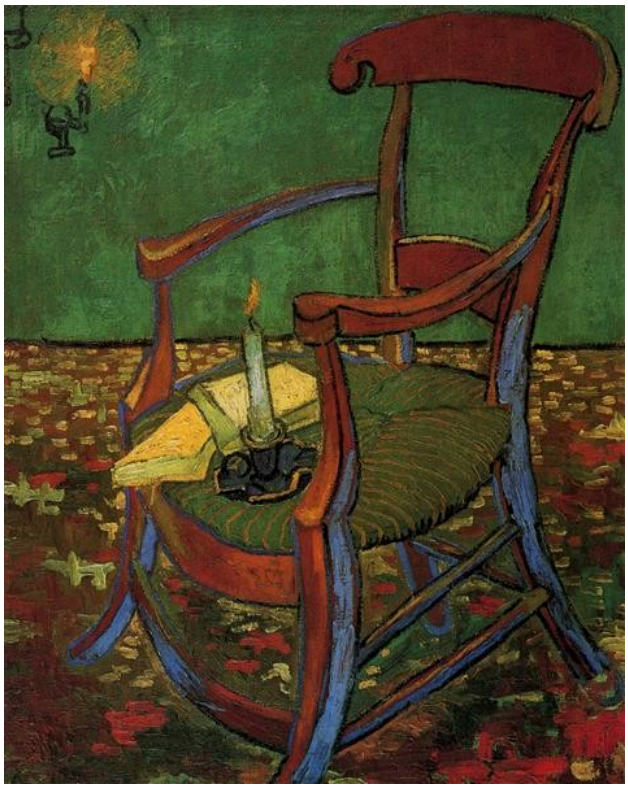
Object source · Open artwork

08 / 20

Gauguin's Armchair

Vincent van Gogh

1888 · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. Paul Gauguin's Armchair. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Books and a burning candle rest on the empty seat. Gauguin himself is absent, and a few chosen objects stand in for him, while the curved chair, the green wall and the patterned floor carry the colour. Beside the previous picture it makes a curious pairing: Gauguin painted Van Gogh at work, and Van Gogh painted Gauguin's empty chair.

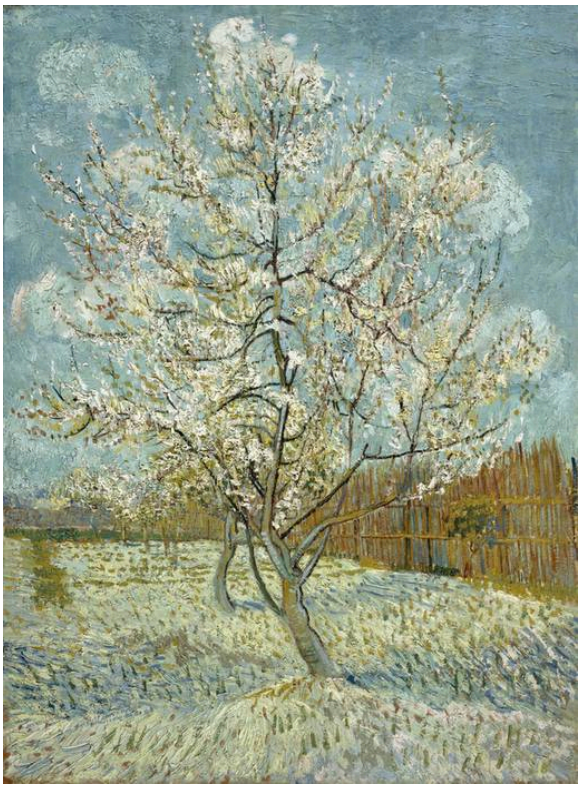
Object source · Open artwork

09 / 20

The Pink Peach Tree

Vincent van Gogh

1888 · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. The pink peach tree. Image credit: Vincent van Gogh. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The blossom is scattered, never massed into one pale canopy, and the gaps keep the slim branches readable against the sky. Fencing and smaller trunks place the tree in an orchard. Almond Blossom, earlier in the selection, also depends on the spaces between branches but cuts away everything else. Here the setting stays.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0025V1962

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Café Table with Absinthe

Vincent van Gogh

1887 · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. Café table with absinth. Image credit: Vincent van Gogh. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

A glass and a carafe stand before a window, one transparent thing set in front of another. Reflections and the street outside find their way into the objects on the table, so that the glass opens onto the space behind it and interrupts it at the same time.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0186V1962

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Phryne

Gustave Boulanger

1850 · Van Gogh Museum



Gustave Boulanger. Phryne. Image credit: Gustave Boulanger. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Boulanger shades the skin with great care, sets the figure among cushions and brings everything to a precise finish. The raised hand and the reclining pose belong to a staged presentation. After the angular hands and faces of The Potato Eaters, this marks the far end of the range in the selection: a body arranged and polished to be looked at.

Object source · Open artwork

12 / 20

The Seine, Morning at Saint-Ouen

Charles Angrand

1886 · Van Gogh Museum



Charles Angrand. The Seine, Morning (Saint-Ouen). Image credit: Charles Angrand. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Almost nothing on this broad river catches the eye. Angrand works instead with small shifts within pale, closely related tones, enough to keep the water quiet without letting it go blank, while trees and buildings mark out a low distance. Sunflowers also keeps to a narrow band of related tones, but Van Gogh crowds it with competing forms. Angrand leaves his almost empty.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0524S2012

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Self-Portrait with a Portrait of Gauguin

Émile Bernard

1888 · Van Gogh Museum



Émile Bernard. Self-Portrait with Portrait of Gauguin. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/emile-bernard/self-portrait-with-portrait-of-gauguin-1888 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Bernard brings another artist into his self-portrait without pretending the two men share a room. His own face, cropped, sits beside a smaller image of Gauguin. The two likenesses keep to separate spaces, and pale blue links them across the gap. In Van Gogh's painting Gauguin appeared only as an empty chair; here he has a face, though still at one remove, as a picture within a picture.

Object source · Open artwork

14 / 20

Haymaking at Éragny

Camille Pissarro

1887 · Van Gogh Museum



Camille Pissarro. The Harvest of Hay in Eragny. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Pissarro paints the haymakers with the same small coloured marks he uses for the ground. They remain recognisable as people, but they are made of the same stuff as the field, and their movements recur among the haystacks in a pattern of repeated labour. Van Gogh's chalk drawing of a woman picking up a stick, next in this selection, works the other way, setting the bending body apart from the trees around it.

Object source · Open artwork

15 / 20

Woman Picking Up a Stick before Trees

Vincent van Gogh

1890 · Chalk on paper · Van Gogh Museum



A Woman Picking Up a Stick in Front of Trees. WikiArt; Vincent van Gogh. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

The sharp bend of the body tells you what is happening before the foliage has been sorted out. The chalk then does the sorting, with strokes running in different directions for the clothing, the trunks and the leaves. Elsewhere the drawing is left open.

Object source · Open artwork

16 / 20

Coal Mine in the Borinage

Vincent van Gogh

1879 · Pencil and watercolour on paper · Van Gogh Museum



Coalmine in the Borinage. WikiArt; Vincent van Gogh. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Low buildings and smoking chimneys spread across a spare landscape, and small figures give the industrial structures a human scale. This pencil and watercolour sheet is the earliest of Van Gogh's works in the selection. It has none of the bright palette later associated with him, but it already takes a place of labour as its subject.

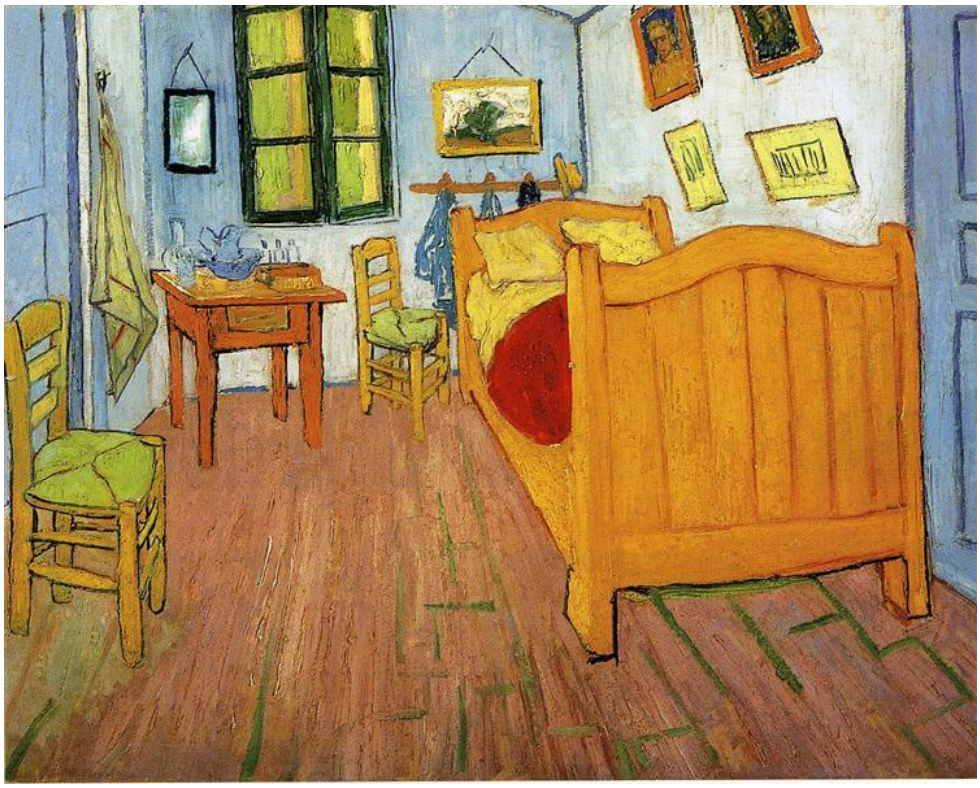
Object source · Open artwork

17 / 20

The Bedroom

Vincent van Gogh

October 1888 · Oil on canvas · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh, The Bedroom, 1888. Reproduction via WikiArt; source label: Public domain. · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The large bed and two chairs leave little free space. Angled furniture and the pictures on the walls keep the simplified geometry conspicuous, and the room is built from strong boundaries and colour relationships. There is more than one Bedroom. The Amsterdam canvas is the version painted in October 1888. Van Gogh's later painted versions, like the sketches of the room in his letters, are separate works.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: s0047V1962

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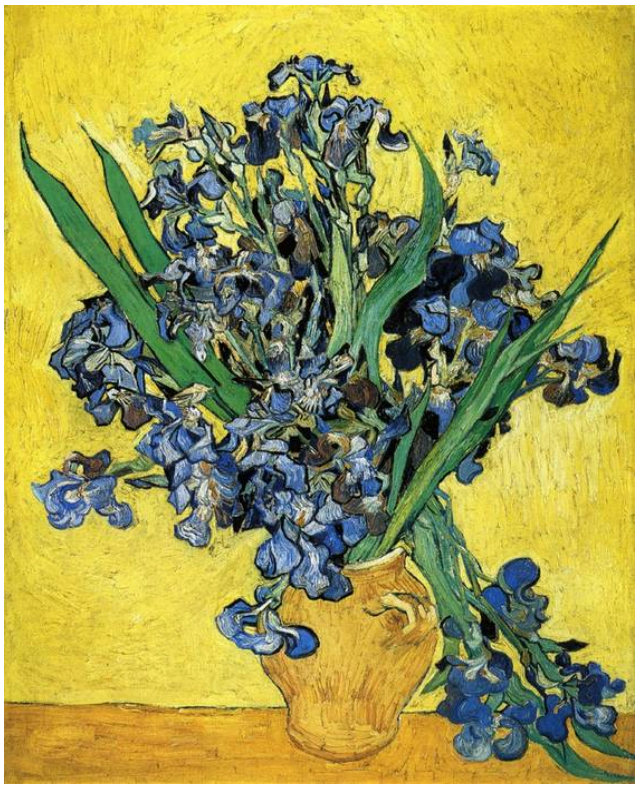
Irises

Vincent van Gogh

1890 · Oil on canvas · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. Still Life with Irises. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/vincent-van-gogh/still-life-with-irises-1890 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The flowers push out against a yellow ground, and pointed leaves and falling stems break past the edge of the bouquet. What survives, though, is not quite what Van Gogh painted. A red pigment has faded, and the irises have shifted from violet towards blue. The contrast with the yellow is still strong, but it is not the contrast he set down, and reproductions show the painting as it is now, not as it first looked.

Object source · Open artwork

19 / 20

Shoes

Vincent van Gogh

1886 · Oil on canvas · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. A Pair of Shoes. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/vincent-van-gogh/a-pair-of-shoes-1886 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The shoes face the viewer at different angles, and the paint lingers over worn leather, openings and laces. Van Gogh gives them room enough to stand as a subject in their own right and identifies no wearer, so the signs of use are left to speak for themselves. In The Potato Eaters work has shaped the people themselves. Here its marks appear without anyone present.

Object source · Open artwork

20 / 20

View of Arles with Irises in the Foreground

Vincent van Gogh

1888 · Oil on canvas · Van Gogh Museum



Vincent van Gogh. View of Arles with Irises in the Foreground. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/vincent-van-gogh/view-of-arles-with-irises-in-the-foreground-1888 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Here the irises serve as a foreground. They keep their busy pattern while the depth opens up behind them, with bands of cultivated land leading back to the distant town, where trees break the far line. Repeated areas of colour carry the eye from front to back. Beside the still life of Irises, the same flower has a quite different job to do.

Object source · Open artwork

Following a thread

Some choices recur across these twenty works, and following one through several of them is a good way to use the selection. Yellow is an obvious candidate. It is kept to a narrow band of related tones in Sunflowers, set hard against a deep blue sky in The Yellow House, and laid down as the ground of Irises, behind flowers that no longer look as they once did. Labour is another, from the small figures at the Borinage mine and the people at the lamplit table in The Potato Eaters to the worn shoes and the woman bending for a stick. Biography can come in where it is documented, and the letters are the place to check it.

Further reading

Vincent van Gogh: The Letters

Vincent van Gogh; edited by Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker · Read free · English translations and original texts

Van Gogh's correspondence, edited for the Van Gogh Museum and the Huygens Institute, with the original texts alongside English translations, images and scholarly notes, all free to read. For a reader of this guide the most useful feature is that the edition can be searched by artwork, so what Van Gogh himself wrote about a painting can be set beside what has been written about it since.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12
