

# THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS ARTISTS

TOM  
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## PREVIEW



TheHistoryOfArt.org

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**(Full eBook contains 100 artists, organised chronologically by period)**





▲ The Deposition of Christ

## Bronzino

*ITALIAN, 1503-1572*

Agnolo Bronzino was a part of the Mannerist movement which emerged in either Florence or Rome around 1520 and followed on from the High Renaissance.

The artist and poet, who is also sometimes known as Agnolo di Cosimo, learnt many of the techniques of the greatest Renaissance masters via his tutor, Pontormo. For the early part of his career he would be most effective at replicating his teacher, much more than other members of the same studio, but after leaving he would then start to develop more of his own unique approach. His main focus would be portraits along with religious and allegorical subjects, and he also held a strong

interest in literature, which would eventually lead to him becoming a poet himself. Indeed, some poets would appear within his list of portraits, but most figures were locally based, including many members of the Medici family who would provide the artist with his highest profile commissions. Bronzino's role as the official court painter of the Duke and his court would provide much needed financial security and also brought some famous names into his oeuvre, including Cosi-



mo I de' Medici himself, as well as his wife, Eleonora di Toledo.

One of the best attributes of Bronzino's paintings would have to be the levels of detail that he incorporated into them, with his touches of drapery being particularly memorable. Some of the traditional clothing worn by his portrait models would be reproduced in photo-realistic forms which even today continues to amaze the viewer. Every last touch of jewelry and flourishes of fashion would be captured by the artist who clearly paid considerable attention to the clothing worn by some of his famous sitters. Some might argue that his precision went beyond a natural expectation, hence his connection to Mannerism, but today one can continue to marvel at the technical and stylish brilliance that he delivered whilst working in the court of the Medici family. His approach would marry elements from the great masters along with his own teacher, though the balance between these competing influences would fluctuate over the period of his career.



▲ Portrait of Eleanor of Toledo

▼ The Holy Family with Infant Saint John the Baptist

## Style and Technique

Bronzino was so adept at recreating Pontormo's style that art historians have struggled to identify which works are his, to the extent that the authorship of some paintings is still in debate. Bronzino's portraits are often described as unemotional, cold, detached and calculated, yet incredibly realistic with a near-perfect level of attention to detail, especially when it came to painting clothing and fabrics. When dealing with the subjects, Bronzino would mold their faces and bodies until they appeared almost three-dimensional. He was adept at capturing 16th-century high society and all of the arrogance that was en vogue at the time. Bronzino's portrait style became incredibly popular with the courts.

He was so popular that his influence affected court portraiture for centuries throughout Europe. When creating his religious and allegorical works, Bronzino painted complex compositions and drew on influences from Michelangelo and Pontormo in his use of contorted bodies. However, unlike Pontormo, Bronzino's paintings lacked fervor or passion and this left the latter's works seemingly empty of emotion despite their technical excellence. Bronzino used chiaroscuro to emphasize lighter figures in his paintings so that they stood out in contrast from his darker backgrounds. In his allegorical work, Bronzino combined use of the naked form with strong symbolism. Bronzino was extremely technically proficient. His brushstrokes left almost no visible texture on his paintings. This gives all of his work, but especially his portraits, a heightened, extremely life-like quality.

## Mannerist Art Explained

Mannerism is also known as the Late Renais-







sance and it commenced in around 1520, running until about 1580. Mannerism is a combination of the styles that came before. The movement drew particular influence from painters such as Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. Bronzino was in his late teens at the time of its arrival. His own work can be described as elegant, though with surfaces that would not appear quite as natural or well balanced as previous styles of Renaissance art and this was typical of this new movement. There would also be an elongation of form, such as with a subject's limbs but Bronzino would not go down this path quite as much as others of his era. By contrast, his master Pontormo would regularly use this method within his own work, and coming from around a decade earlier, he would be classed as typical of the early Mannerist period. Whilst there were common characteristics that many members shared, it could not be claimed that all Mannerist artists followed



▲ Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time

a precise style, and so the definitions of the movement are not as clear as they might be for other art movements. The end of the movement would be brought about by the rise of the Baroque era in 1580 which would itself bring in another stylistic change in European art, architecture and literature.

### **Bronzino's Most Famous Paintings**

In part because of their own historical fame, the artist's portraits of Cosimo I de' Medici and Eleonora di Toledo remain known as some of his most famous paintings. His connection to the Medici family was also highly significant with regards to his development. His role as the official court painter of the Duke is often how his career is introduced, and some of these depictions are also good examples of his signature approach. His depictions of Dante and Petrarch are also fairly well known and remind us of his own interest in poetry. Aside from these paintings, and portraits of other figures from the court, there were also a number of respected allegorical and religious artworks, with Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time being the highlight of those. That particular piece would prove controversial for many centuries but today is perhaps seen as his most famous painting of all.

### **Influences**

Jacopo Pontormo - Pontormo had a much greater influence on Bronzino than any other artist. The two painters met in Florence in 1515 when Bronzino became Pontormo's student when the former was 12 years old. The two remained friends and Bronzino served as Pontormo's assistant until Pontormo died in 1557. Pontormo primarily painted religious works during his long career as an artist in Florence. Bronzino would also create a large



number of religious paintings, but he was never considered to be his mentor's equal in this genre. The earliest drawings and paintings from Bronzino would all be particularly similar to his tutor's approach but after moving away, so his style would begin to draw in other influences. In time, Bronzino would actually have a number of his own pupils, continuing the lineage of Renaissance art which had already passed through many generations of Florentine society, each time adding something new to what had gone before.

Andrea del Sarto - Whether or not Bronzino was a student of Andrea del Sarto during the former's time in Florence is a matter of some historical debate. It is thought that Bronzino learned some of his painting style from Sarto. What is certain, is that Bronzino was strongly influenced by Sarto through Pontormo, who was one of Sarto's students. Sarto was also responsible for bridging the gap between the old-style, Italian High Renaissance, and the movement in which Bronzino worked, Italian Mannerism. Like Sarto, Bronzino painted using slightly elongated forms for his subjects and bold colors. This may have come directly from Sarto himself or may have come via Pontormo. Sarto, like Bronzino, paid close attention to detail and may have been the inspiration for this aspect of both Bronzino's and Pontormo's work.

Michelangelo - Bronzino idolized the work of Michelangelo. From 1530 to 1560, the mid-to-late stages of Bronzino's career, the painter worked hard to emulate Michelangelo's mastery of the human form. Like the Renaissance painter, several of Bronzino's paintings included nude figures. Beyond his attention to anatomical detail, Michelangelo's influence is also evident in the character poses featured in Bronzino's religious paint-

ings. However, another more interesting link exists between the two painters in that they both included ghoulish subjects in many of their paintings. Some of Bronzino's carefully crafted studies of limbs and torsos will remind even the most fleeting of art followers of Michelangelo's own earlier contributions.

Leonardo da Vinci - While many artists of this generation had some connection to da Vinci and his work, Bronzino's was one of the closest. Pontormo, who acted as Bronzino's mentor, studied directly under da Vinci as a junior painter in the early 16th century while living in Florence. It is likely that Pontormo accumulated various techniques from da Vinci which influenced his early style, and these were passed on to Bronzino. Like da Vinci, Bronzino worked towards mastery of realism rooted in an extreme attention to detail. However, unlike da Vinci, Bronzino's sitters convey an icy detached feeling. Several drawing methods had been picked up by Pontormo, such as grid techniques and these would certainly have been taught to Bronzino, though he would not necessarily have taken all of the ideas into his own work. A lack of surviving drawings from his career has made it harder to determine precisely which techniques he made use of himself.

### **Drawings**

The artist was a highly skilled draftsman, but only a few of his drawings would survive to the present day. The majority of his work was completed in red and black chalk and his early drawing style was similar to his master, Pontormo. Over time he would display more of a similarity with the likes of Michelangelo, along with elements of Raphael and Da Vinci. He produced a number of highly detailed studies of parts of the anatomy as well as por-







traits. Smaller, quicker sketches are likely to have been produced at the time but later lost or destroyed within his studio. There were also some rare examples that made use of charcoal, but this tended to be more of a preference for other artists of that period. He had a strong work ethic with regards to practicing this discipline, and is quoted several times as telling younger artists of the importance of mastering this art form, whatever their main artistic specialization would later become.

### **Poetry**

Bronzino was a well regarded poet and this discipline would influence some of his paintings. He was highly familiar with the works of poets Dante and Petrarch, for example, and would produce portraits of them too. Some have suggested that he actually went as far as being able to recite their texts entirely from his own memory. He would bring humor into many of his own poems, and there would also be sexual themes fairly regularly, including the use of double-entendres. Some of his words have also helped to explain more about his work in the visual arts, including his attitudes to drawing when very few have lasted to the present day. Bronzino is remembered for producing a Petrarchan canzoniere and several burlesque poems which suited his writing style. In total, he would put together many hundreds of poems during his lifetime, spread across a variety of collections but today very little is mentioned about his poetry. Within his own lifetime, however, he would receive a strong reception for his written works, with many appreciating how he would continue certain Florentine traits within his own words.

### **Bronzino's Followers**

Bronzino's influence had a far-reaching impact that was felt across all court portraiture for over one hundred years after he died in 1572. Other artists adopted Bronzino's cold and aloof style in capturing the arrogance and pride of European nobility. Of all his works, Bronzino's portraits are his most accomplished and serve as his primary legacy to the art world.

Alessandro Allori - Allori began as Bronzino's student at the age of 5 and was eventually adopted by the painter. Their strong relationship influenced each other and in many ways Allori's relationship to Bronzino mirrors that of Bronzino and Pontormo. Allori was a court painter, like Bronzino, and served Florence's ruling family, the Medicis. Like Bronzino, Allori paid extreme attention to detail and realism. Allori also adopted similar blank expressions to convey the arrogance of the sitter. The two artists were so similar, that some portraits were falsely attributed to Bronzino when they were painted by Allori. Allori is said to be the last of the Mannerists in the pre-Baroque era.

Michael Dahl - Dahl was a painter from Sweden who was active in England during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Dahl was considered to be one of the greatest painters in England at the time, and the only one to rival Sir Godfrey Kneller. Bronzino's style can be felt in Dahl's use of intricately detailed and extravagant clothing, as well as in the detached and arrogant faces of the sitting nobility.

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres - Ingres was like Bronzino in that he was best known for his court portraits. Unlike many other artists, Ingres preferred to capture and conserve historical styles of painting.





▲ The Great Wave of Kanagawa

## Katsushika Hokusai

*JAPANESE, 1760-1849*

Katsushika Hokusai would become one of the most famous Japanese artists in history, leaving behind hundreds of paintings that continue to amaze and inspire the art public every year.

Known as Tokitaro during his childhood, the man who is now famously known as Katsushika Hokusai showed little sign of becoming a famous painter. In a similar fashion to most of the greatest artists who ever walked the earth, no one noticed his prowess until much later when the gray hair, and especially the balding head, was already setting in. Although his earlier work is considered a marvel by many art critics, he did not gain recognition until he was commissioned to

produce a series named Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji. One of the works in the series - The Great Wave - won him instant fame.

### **The Making of a Legend**

Born in the tenth year of what was known as the Horekai period (1760) in Edo, Japan, Hokusai was always destined to follow a creative profession. His father was an artisan whose trade was mirror-making. It is suggested that since his father's work involved



painting various designs around the mirrors he made for the shogun, Hokusai learned the art from him. However, he never inherited anything from him, probably because his mother was a concubine. His career began to take shape in his early teens and he was sent by his father to a bookshop and lending library, an institution that was frequented by people in the middle and upper classes.

Here, the people entertained themselves by reading books produced from wooden blocks with which the young Hokusai became highly familiar. When he was 14, he began working for a wood-carver as an apprentice and left at the age of 18 to work with Katsukawa Shunsho, an artist who used the ukiyo-e style. Soon, Hokusai would master this approach that involved woodblock prints and paintings. He became the head of the Katsukawa School. Much of the ukiyo-e style was focused on making images of Kabuki actors and courtesans whose popularity in Japanese

cities was at its highest. It was common for Japanese artists to take up numerous names. Hokusai had used more than thirty pseudonyms by the end of his life, which was significantly more than any other artist at that time.

His name changes were frequent and were often associated with the changes in his style and the way he produced his art. Therefore, they were used to break his life into different periods as his career progressed. Hokusai was named Shunro, his first pseudonym, by his master. Under the name, he came up with pictures of Kabuki actors which he made into a series in 1779. While he worked with Shunsho, he married his wife who later died in the 1790s. He married again in 1797 and from the two marriages, he bore two sons and three daughters. Under his direction, Oi, his youngest daughter, also became an artist.

### **Moving Away from Tradition**



▲ Fine Wind, Clear Morning



The death of Shunsho, his master, changed things for Hokusai. Instead of breaking him, his expulsion by Shunsho's chief disciple, Shunko, from the Katsukawa School, helped develop his artistic style. He had acquired Dutch copper engravings which exposed him to European artistic styles. The subjects of Hokusai's works also changed. Moving away from the actors and courtesans which were the main subjects of the ukiyo-e style, he focused his skills and talents on landscapes as well as the different social status of ordinary Japanese people. One of the most popular works produced by the artist at the time is *Fireworks at the Ryogoku Bridge* created in 1790.



▲ Cuckoo and Azaleas

## The Big Break

Hokusai took up the pseudonym 'Tawaraya Sori' after he became associated with the Tawaraya School. Under the name, he came up with *Surinomo*, which consisted of a number of brush paintings. He also illustrated a book titled *Kyoka Ehon*, a collection of humorous poems. He, however, soon gave his name to a pupil and decided to go it alone as Hokusai Tomisa, an artist without connection to any school. He adopted one of his most popular names, Katsushika Hokusai in around 1800. While Katsushika was the name of his birthplace in Edo, Hokusai meant 'north studio'.

The first works he published under this name were collections of landscape paintings known as *Eight Views of Edo* and *Famous Sights of the Eastern Capital*. During this time he took around fifty students under his wing. As the years went by, Hokusai's fame increased, courtesy of his unique ability to promote himself as well as the excellence of his work. He was responsible for the creation of a portrait of Daruma, a Buddhist priest during a festival held in Tokyo in 1804. It was 600 feet high and made using buckets of ink, applied with a broom. Having displayed his artistic prowess in the Shogun Iyenari's court, he was consequently invited to compete against an artist who was more accomplished in traditional brush strokes.

Hokusai's work included painting a blue curve on paper and passing it across a chicken with red-painted feet. He won the Shogun's heart by explaining that the painting represented maple leaves floating in the Tatsuta River. Hokusai collaborated with Takizawa Bakin, a famous novelist, in producing a series of books. However, they parted ways while they were working on the fourth illustrated book due to differences in their artistic



opinions. Nevertheless, the publisher chose Hokusai over Bakin mainly because the quality of any illustrations was critical in the success of printed works at that time.

### **Passion for his own Work**

Hokusai insisted that his book illustrations should not be changed in any way. Twice, he wrote to publishers and block-cutters who helped produce his designs in a Japanese edition of a collection of Chinese poetry. In one of his letters, he complains that Egawa Tomekichi, the block-cutter had not followed his style in shaping some heads during the production of the book titled Toshisen Ehon.

He also wrote to another block-cutter named Sugita Kinsuke, insisting that he (Sugita) should abandon the Utagawa-school style he had cut the eyes and noses of the figures in and make amendments in order to ensure that they were cut in his (Hokusai's) style. Evident of his great influence, the publisher corrected the style even when hundreds of the book's copies had already been printed.

### **An Accomplished Teacher**

When he was aged 51, Hokusai took up Tai-to, yet another name. Under it, he produced the Hokusai Manga (random drawings) and art manuals known as etehon. He also came up with Quick Lessons in Simplified Drawing which together with the art manuals helped him increase the number of his pupils and earn a living. He published the first book in the Hokusai manga series in 1814. Known by the same title, the modern comics were influenced by the sketches produced in the book.

One of his biggest accomplishments was the Big Daruma. It was a painting completed in 1817 and measured 18 x 10.8 meters. The people who witnessed the work during its

development at the Hongan-ji Nagoya Bet-suin were spell-bound by the skill and talent of the artist. Unfortunately, the original work was destroyed but the promotional handbills survive to date in preservation at the Nagoya City Museum.

### **National Fame**

It was when he changed his name to Litsu that Hokusai gained recognition as an artist all over Japan. Among his work during that time was Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji which included the Great Wave off Kanagawa, which he is famously known for and helped him to clear his considerable debts. Its increasing popularity inspired him to add an additional ten prints to the series at a later date.

Some of the most popular print series Hokusai produced during that time included Oceans of Wisdom, A Tour of the Waterfalls of the Provinces, and Unusual Views of Celebrated Bridges in the Provinces.

### **Old but Still Mad About Art**

Hokusai came up with another popular series, One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji, during the period that began in 1834. He had changed his name to Gakyō Rōjin Manji, meaning 'The Old Man Mad About Art'. Referring to this work, he said that he had not accomplished anything worth noting until he reached the age of 70, even though he had a passion for art since he was aged six and had published numerous drawings since he was fifty.

He said that his understanding of the structure of birds, animals, fishes, insects was still developing even at the age of 73. However, he was optimistic that by the age of 86, he would make great progress and further understand their meaning at ninety. At a hundred years of age, he said that he would have







reached a level that could only be ‘marvelous and divine’. At the age of 110, every dot and line would have its own breath.

### **Fading Away**

An unfortunate incident happened to Hokusai in 1839. A fire gutted his studio and destroyed most of his work. He managed to complete *Ducks in a Stream* at the age of 87. However, his career was fast fading away as younger artists became more popular. Hokusai never gave up on his passion; he always sought to innovate. On his deathbed, he implored Heaven to give him more time to become a ‘real’ painter.

### **Other Styles**

Some of the other styles used by Hokusai in his works included *Shunga*, a form of erotic art. A loose translation of *Shunga* is ‘picture of spring’. It was usually a type of *ukiyo-e* which used the format of woodblock print. While it entertained people of both gender and all social status, *Shunga* was surrounded by customs and superstitions. For instance, it was used by samurais as protection against death. Homeowners and merchants also considered it adequate protection against fire.

It was common for brides to be given *ukiyo-e* showing erotics scenes obtained from the *Tale of Genji* as presents, and there is evidence suggesting that the sons and daughters of wealthy people used *Shunga* as a form of sexual guidance. This meant that people of different social classes owned *Shunga* as personal property.

### **Artistic Work and Influence**

Although he showed the clearest signs of becoming an artist at a tender age and produced many works when he was in his fifties, Hoku-

sai shot to fame only after his 60th year. This was the time he produced some of his most popular works. Most prominent of all is *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji*, the series that utilized the *ukiyo-e* style and was completed by 1833. It has 46 prints, with ten of them added after the first publication. *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* was published in 1834. Today, it is considered one of the most significant works in Hokusai’s collection of books featuring landscape pictures.

He is remembered for using his *ukiyo-e* style to transform art from the traditional portraits featuring famous actors and courtesans - a form which was common in Japan’s cities in the Edo era - to a style that took into account a broader perspective that mainly involved animals, plants and landscapes. Hokusai’s largest work is *Hokusai Manga*, a collection consisting of 15 volumes holding almost 4,000 caricatures. While 12 of the volumes were published before 1820, 3 were published posthumously.

The sketches feature religious figures, ordinary people, and animals. Most of them take a humorous form and would prove popular with the wider public. While they are considered to have set the pace for modern manga, one of the main differences between the two forms of art is the fact that *Hokusai Manga* are sketches of people, animals and objects while modern manga are story-based books using the style of comic books.

Hokusai’s art name and obsession with Mount Fuji was mostly influenced by his religious beliefs. Meaning ‘north studio’, the name Hokusai is an abbreviation of *Hokushinsai*, which means ‘north star studio’. He belonged to the Buddhist Nichiren sect which believed that the North Star was related to



Figure 1. The Great Tree of the World





Myōken, a deity. According to Japanese tradition and beliefs, Mount Fuji was associated with eternal life. In the *Tales of the Bamboo Cutter*, a goddess puts the elixir of life on Mount Fuji's peak. It was, therefore, believed to hold the secret of immortality, all the more reason for Hokusai's strong attachment to it.

### **Influence out of the Homeland**

During his lifetime, Hokusai's work never left Japan. This was largely because Japan was under *Sakoku*, a policy that put the death penalty on anyone who moved out or into the country. It was only in the 1850s that the American navy under Matthew Perry's command arrived aboard the 'black ships' that Japan abandoned its isolationist policies. Then, diplomats, officers, collectors and artists discovered the existence of woodblock printing used in Japan.

One of the greatest impacts of his work in the West was his tendency to delineate space with line and color instead of adopting a single perspective. The *ukiyo-e* styled prints appealed to young artists including Félix Bracquemond, a French artist who first chanced upon a copy of Hokusai *Manga*, the sketch book, at his printer's workshop.

However, most of the first Japanese prints that found their way out of the country were just contemporary works of art, and not the masterpieces produced earlier by older artists like Hokusai. In fact, many of them were used to wrap commercial goods. On April 1 1867, the Champ de Mars saw the opening of *Exposition Universelle*. For the first time ever, there was a Japanese pavilion showcasing *ukiyo-e* prints. French artists got a chance to see Japanese prints and understand how it was produced. Soon Claude Monet acquired 250 prints from Japan. Among them were 23

by Hokusai. Influenced by Hokusai's depiction of one subject over many images, Monet produced a series of poplars and grainstacks, *Waterloo Bridge* and *Rouen Cathedral*.

Hokusai's influence on Monet spread way beyond just his artistic direction. His Giverny garden in France takes the design of a Japanese print, including the use of bamboo and arcing of the bridge. Additionally, his wife Camille took to wearing a kimono. While Monet was influenced by Hokusai's landscapes, other artists fell for the human and animal forms. One of them is Edgar Degas who found inspiration for his *fin-de-siècle* women depictions in France from Hokusai's manga.

While the dancers have their faces in profile and backs curved like in Japanese portraiture, Hokusai's influence is in the bathers. Additionally, Degas' etching of *Mary Cassatt* at the Louvre has all the likeness of Hokusai's manga. While Cassatt puts her weight on one leg, she imitates the pose of a woman who is being pulled away by a wild horse. Another great benefit derived from the entrance of Japanese print, especially Hokusai's, into the French art scene is the raising of the reputation of the graphic arts industry. Printmaking was now seen as a respectable medium for artists to pursue. A lover of Japanese prints herself, Cassatt owed a good deal of her modern printmaking techniques to the introduction of Japanese art to France.

One other artist who owes his success to the arrival of Japanese art in France is Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. While he began as a painter, he almost completely focused on printing and poster-making soon afterwards. It is evident that the *ukiyo-e* style is at work in his *Divan Japonais* poster. Jane Avril, the cancan dancer is portrayed in a severe, Oriental profile. Moreover, Hokusai's influence is clear in



the big solid color panels that frequently appear in posters and prints done by Lautrec. Hokusai and Japanese art in general are responsible for influencing the birth of a new style known as Jugendstil in Germany or Art Nouveau.

It is widely accepted that without Hokusai, there would be no such thing as Impressionism which was exhibited by such artists as Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet. Some of the artists who collected his woodcuts include August Macke, Franz Marc, van Gogh, Klimt, Gauguin as well as Monet and Degas. *Peitschenhieb* by Hermann Obrist shows all the signs of Hokusai influence and became an example of the Impressionist movement.

### **Summary**

Edo's claim to fame may be giving way to what is now Tokyo, Japan. The world, however, owes it much more for producing one of the most talented and persistent artists of his time. Trained as a woodblock cutter and accomplishing great success as a commercial artist, Hokusai is remembered for his unique range of both subject and style. Even when he gained national recognition for work produced in later years, he was in the true spirit of an artist - he always insisted that the best was yet to come.

He believed that his talents and skills would become sharper as he aged. While he produced different works with diverse levels of quality throughout his long career as an artist, the best of them were completed when he was in his early 70s. The destruction of his studio and many of his artworks by fire did not deter him from producing more and he worked till he breathed his last breath aged 90.





▲ Little Girl in a Blue Armchair

## Mary Cassatt

*AMERICAN, 1844-1926*

Mary Cassatt was a famous American painter, and member of the French Impressionist movement. She was one of three women known as Les Trois Grandes Dames.

Cassatt created breathtaking depictions based around the social and private lives of women, putting emphasis on the special bonds between children and their mothers. Her work would offer a unique perspective within the Impressionist movement, bringing something a little different to this famous artist collective. Her role as an American woman diverged from the status quo of this movement and over time she earned the respect of its other members.

She was born on 22 May 1844 in Allegheny City in Pennsylvania, which is currently part of Pittsburgh. Her father was Robert Simpson Cassatt, a successful land speculator and stockbroker.

Her mother was Katherine Kelso Johnston, who came from a family with a baking background. Katherine Cassatt was educated and well-read and had a great influence on Mary Cassatt. Their ancestral name was previously Cossart. The family later moved eastward;



first to Lancaster, then Pennsylvania and eventually to Philadelphia, where the 6-year-old Mary started her schooling.

She was raised in an environment that saw travel as an integral part of an effective education. As such, Mary spent 5 years in Europe, visiting many of the capitals in the continent, including Berlin, Paris and London. While she was abroad, Mary learned French and German; she also took lessons in music and drawing.

It's likely that Mary's first exposure to the famous French artists Gustave Courbet, Camille Corot, Eugène Delacroix and Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres was at the 1855 Paris World's Fair. Camille Pissarro and Edgar Degas - who were later Mary's mentors and colleagues - also attended the exhibition.

Although Mary's family didn't want her to become a professional artist, she joined PAFA in Philadelphia to study painting when she was 15 years old. Part of her family's concerns was Mary's exposure to feminism and the bohemian behavior that was seen in some

male students. For this reason, Mary and her friendship network started advocating equal rights for both sexes.

Although 20 percent of the students in that art school were females, the majority viewed art as a skill that was socially valuable. Few of these students were determined - as Mary was - to pursue art as their career. From 1861 through 1865, she continued her studies. Thomas Eakins, a realist painter, was one of her fellow students.

Mary was impatient with the pace of instruction as well as the patronizing attitude that the male teachers and students had. She, therefore, started studying the old masters by herself and later ended her formal studies. In 1866, she moved to Paris after overcoming her father's disapproval, with her family friends and mother acting as chaperones. Because women were not yet allowed to join the influential art school *École des Beaux-Arts*, Mary decided to apply to be taught privately by masters from the school.

She was accepted to study privately with

▼ Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge

▼ The Boating Party







Mary Cassatt



the French painter and sculptor Jean-Léon Gérôme who was a respected teacher recognised for his hyper-realistic style and his portrayal of exotic subjects.

In late 1866, Mary decided to join a painting class that was taught by genre artist Charles Joshua Chaplin. During the same year, Mary studied with the French artist Thomas Couture. In 1868, the selection jury for the Salon accepted Mary's *A Mandolin Player*, one of the only 2 paintings by this artist from the first ten years of her career that's documented today. Mary was one of the two women from the United States to first exhibit their work in the Paris Salon.

As the Franco-German War (War of 1870) was starting, Mary returned to the United States and lived in Altoon, Blair County, Pennsylvania. She stayed together with her family. She placed 2 of her works in a New York-based gallery and found lots of admirers. She later traveled to Chicago, where she lost some of her early works in the 1871 Great Chicago Fire. The archbishop of Pittsburgh was attracted by Mary's work and commissioned her to paint 2 copies of paintings by Antonio Allegri da Correggio in Parma. She then went back to Europe with fellow artist Emily Sartain.

Just months after returning to Europe in 1871, her prospects had brightened. One of Mary's paintings was received well in the 1872 Salon, leading to its sale. Mary attracted favorable notice in Parma, with the art community supporting and encouraging her. After finishing the archbishop's paintings, Mary traveled to Seville and Madrid, where she executed a group of paintings with Spanish subjects. In 1874, she took up residence in France and opened a studio in the capital city. She continued expressing criticism of

the Salon politics and the conventional taste prevailing there.

In 1877, Edgar Degas invited the artist to show her works together with the Impressionists, who didn't have a formal manifesto and varied significantly in technique and subject matter. They used *Plein air* painting and applied vibrant colors in different strokes with a bit of pre-mixing, allowing the eye of the viewer to merge the results of the work in an "impressionistic" manner.

Mary Cassatt admired Degas, whose pastel works had made an impact on her when she met him in 1875. She accepted Edgar's invitation and started working on the paintings that she would exhibit in an 1879 Impression-



▲ *The Child's Bath*

ist exhibition.

During the intervening 2 years, Mary's style had become more spontaneous. She also produced several portraits of her family mem-



bers. Her style evolved, and she decided to move away from Impressionism and chose a simpler, straightforward approach. After 1886, she stopped identifying herself with art movements and started experimenting with various techniques, working with a new found freedom and confidence.

In 1911, Mary was diagnosed with cataracts, neuralgia, rheumatism and diabetes. This didn't slow her down initially, though after 1914, the artist became blind and stopped painting. Mary died on 14 June 1926 and was buried at Le Mesnil-Théribus, a commune located in the Oise in northern France. A public garden located in one of the twenty arrondissements of Paris is named after the artist in her memory.





Chagall





▲ The Dream

## Henri Rousseau

*FRENCH, 1844-1910*

Henri Rousseau was a French painter known for his vivid and imaginative jungle scenes, which he created using a unique and naive style which was entirely self-taught.

The son of a carpenter, Henri Julien Félix Rousseau was born on May 21 1844, in Laval, France. When he was eight years old, his family was made bankrupt and consequently lost their home. Rousseau was left in the care of a boarding school, where he developed a love of drawing.

Rousseau attended school in Laval until 1860. In his late teens, he was employed at a law firm. However, his career path changed forever when he committed perjury and was

arrested. To evade his jail sentence, Rousseau signed up for the French army in 1863. However, he still had to serve a one month sentence. Rousseau's father passed away in 1868 and he was excused from army duties so that he could support his mother.

On leaving the army Rousseau moved to Paris, where he began working as a customs officer at the entrance to the city. It was at this time that Rousseau also married his first wife, Clemence Boitard. After losing several



children in infancy, their one surviving offspring, Julia, lived on into adulthood. Rousseau's sole aim was to master an academic style, and he genuinely believed that his pictures were compelling and real. The artist was such a sincere and genuine character, that he took even sarcastic remarks literally and accepted them as praise. His positive outlook helped him endure great poverty. Many contemporary critics regarded his working class background as a drawback.

In 1871, shortly after his first marriage, Rousseau was hired by Paris Octroi where his job was to collect tax on goods coming into Paris. The job included long stints of free time, which probably gave Rousseau an opportunity to focus on his art. While working as a customs officer in Paris, Rousseau taught himself to paint and would exhibit his work almost every year from 1886 until his death. He earned the moniker "Le Douanier" from

his comrades in the Parisian avant-garde.

Rousseau had never had a formal art education; instead, he taught himself by faithfully replicating paintings in the art museums of Paris and by sketching in the city's botanical gardens and natural history museums. Because he had not studied art according to any prescribed method or under any teacher's supervision, the artist developed a highly personal style which was to prove his point of difference.

His earliest known works were local views, naïve in both their detail and in their perception. This seemingly direct storytelling then led to inventive, imaginative, and dream-like works. However obsessed Rousseau was with exact and particular detail, he was able to control his composition, consolidating what might have been a host of minute and disparate observations into a coherent whole. He worked slowly and carefully, applying many

▼ The Sleeping Gypsy





layers of paint and exotic jewel-like color.

As Rousseau had not learned anatomy or perspective; his paintings' vivid colors, ambiguous spaces, non-realistic scale and dramatic intensity gave them a surreal quality. Sometimes Rousseau borrowed details from paintings he had viewed at museums or images he had seen in books and magazines, transforming them into elements of his own visions.

Although he set his sights on becoming a famous academic painter, ironically, Rousseau instead became the complete opposite: a quintessential naïve artist. Largely self-taught, Rousseau developed a style that laid bare his lack of academic training. One-point perspective, the absence of correct proportions and the use of piercing, often unnatural colors resulted in a body of work imbued with mystery and unconventionality. In one of his paintings the bananas are shown growing upside-down and in other paintings he grouped

together animals from different continents that would never live side by side in the wild.

In 1884 Rousseau had begun to copy work in the Louvre. He studied briefly with the academic painter Jean Léon Gérôme at the École des Beaux-Arts. In 1886 Rousseau exhibited for the first time at the Salon des Indépendants, where he exhibited fairly regularly until his death. He supported himself by giving lessons in painting, diction, and music and he was a skilled violinist.

The following year he painted *Carnival Evening* and *A Thunderbolt*. Followed by *Expectation*, *A Poor Fellow*, *After the Feast*, *Departure*, *Picnic*, *The Suicide*, *For my Father*, *Myself Self-Portrait*, *Tiger Chasing Explorers*, *A Hundred Years of Independence*, *Liberty*, *The Last of the 41st*, *War* and some 200 drawings, both pen and ink and pencil, along with some landscapes of Paris.

Many of Rousseau's signature paintings depicted human figures or wild animals in jun-

▼ *Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!)*





gle-like settings such as *Tiger in a Tropical Storm* of 1891. In each of his paintings there is typically a dramatic event, taking place in the center, such as a lion attacking its prey. This is in keeping with Rousseau's preference for grandiose, historical and dramatic narratives within traditional painting.

Using student quality paint due to limited finances, Rousseau spent a considerable amount of time on each painting, so his collection of work is not extensive. His painting technique was also unique since he applied one layer of paint at a time, creating multiple layers in each piece. He painted each color one by one – firstly the blues and then the greens and so on – and painted from top to bottom. When Rousseau painted jungles, he sometimes used more than 50 shades of green. Although from nature, his foliage was adapted to suit his artistic needs and is often unrecognizable as a particular plant.

Also the careful blending of brushstrokes that result in a smooth surface is representative of his individualized approach to painting. Another quality of his technique was the use of controlled brush strokes which make each object in the painting appear outlined. Rousseau's work was characterized by heavy dependence on line, stiff portraiture, wild juxtapositions and flattened perspective from which the Cubists and Surrealists drew heavily. His imagination was central to his work.

Although Rousseau's art was not understood or accepted by the conservative, official art world of Paris, he was able to show his work in annual exhibitions organized by the *Société des Artistes Indépendants*. He submitted works to these open, un-juried shows from 1886 until the end of his life. His art was seen and appreciated by established artists such as Camille Pissarro and Paul Signac,

who praised his direct, emotional approach to his subject matter.

Rousseau's colleagues at Paris Octroi continued to support his artistic pursuits and in 1893, at the age of 49, Rousseau retired from his paid employment and was able to dedicate himself to his art full-time. That year he met the writer Alfred Jarry, who introduced him to members of the Parisian artistic and literary avant-garde, including Pablo Picasso, Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob and Marie Laurencin, all of whom became admirers of his work.

In 1897, Rousseau painted *The Sleeping Gypsy*. This fantastical depiction of a lion with a sleeping woman on a moonlit night is one of the most recognisable artworks of modern times. In 1898, 10 years after the death of his first wife from Tuberculosis, Rousseau married Josephine Noury. She died just a few years later in 1903, leaving the artist heartbroken.

Rousseau's career then suffered a setback when he was imprisoned for bank fraud in 1907 after a musician acquaintance of his, Louis Savaget, persuaded him to participate in bank fraud. The series of notes he wrote to the judge petitioning for release, which exaggerated his character and his merits, account for some of the most accurate information on the artist in existence today. It is uncertain whether Rousseau was tricked into participating in the fraud or did so willingly. Whatever the case, he used his reputation of being unworldly as his defense. His friends also backed up his claim, which convinced the authorities, and Rousseau was freed from jail.

Finally the innocence and charm of his works won him the admiration of the leading artists. In 1905 he exhibited his large jungle compo-







sition *The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope* along with Henri Matisse at the first showing of *Les Fauves*.

On 2 September 1910, whilst in Paris Rousseau died of blood poisoning that resulted from an infected wound in his leg. A few months before his death, he exhibited his final painting *The Dream*, the largest of his many jungle paintings. *The Dream* was later much celebrated by the Surrealists, whose art valued surprising juxtapositions and dream-like moods. It is now considered to be Rousseau's masterpiece.

Despite his extensive network of connections including many artists and dealers, Rousseau never profited from his paintings. The artist offered *The Sleeping Gypsy* for sale for 200 francs, but his offer was rejected as the painting was considered "too childish". Now one of the best-loved examples of poster art, this and other works including *The Dream* and *Carnival Evening* influenced many artists who came after him.

His work continued to influence other artists, from his friend Pablo Picasso, to Fernand Léger, Max Ernst and the Surrealists. Picasso hosted a dinner in the painter's honor in 1908, which duly triggered a wave of intellectual interest in Rousseau's works, and elevated his primitivism to the level of high art.

André Breton, also hailed Rousseau as a 'proto-Surrealist' for his art's absurdist, metaphysical quality, and use of bright colors and clear outlines, anticipating the compositions of Surrealists such as Rene Magritte and Giorgio de Chirico. Endowed with an oddly appealing strangeness that could evoke mystery within the commonplace and the exotic, Rousseau's oeuvre left an impression on art-

ists of the next generation and beyond.

Ultimately, though, Rousseau's appeal for Modernists like Picasso lay in the 'primitive', untutored nature of his style. "Picasso wanted to draw and paint like a child, and he thought that because of his training at the academy in Spain, he never could," the French curator Estelle Fresneau explained at the Tate Modern's Rousseau retrospective in 2005. "So he was impressed by Rousseau because Rousseau's style was pure. Rousseau never tried what people wanted him to do. Actually, I think that Rousseau was very clever. He was conscious that he was inventing a new way to paint." Perhaps, then, the father of naive art wasn't so naive after all.





Henri Rousseau  
1908





▲ The Lady of Shalott

## John William Waterhouse

*BRITISH, 1849-1917*

John William Waterhouse was a 19th-century British painter known for his Pre-Raphaelite-inspired depictions of mythological and literary themes, often featuring ethereal female figures.

The artist was a Victorian-era painter who is remembered for his beautiful and romantic depictions of mythological and literary subjects. His paintings were characterized by a vivid use of color, attention to detail, and a deep sense of emotion and drama. His works often featured classical figures, such as nymphs, mermaids, and sirens, as well as characters from literature, including Shakespeare and Tennyson. Waterhouse's legacy lies in his unique ability to capture the essence

of these mythological and literary worlds in a way that was both beautiful and haunting.

### **Birth and Early Life**

He was born in 1849 to parents, William and Isabella Waterhouse in Rome, Italy. Waterhouse's parents were both English painters and had moved to Italy to work. The exact date of his birth is unconfirmed. However, he was baptized on the 6th April of that year and this is often credited as his date of birth.



According to Peter Trippi, a scholar of Waterhouse's work, there is evidence to suggest he was actually born between the 1st and 23rd January 1849.

In the same year as Waterhouse's birth, some of the earliest members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood began to cause a stir in the art scene in London. Some of the most notable artists amongst them included William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The Waterhouses decided to return to England in 1854 when John William Waterhouse was just five years of age.

They lived in a newly built home in South Kensington, London, which was located close to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Nino, as Waterhouse was nicknamed, would spend a lot of time there and also at both the National Gallery and the British Museum. His artistic parents encouraged their son to sketch during these visits.



▲ Ophelia

▼ The Soul of the Rose

## Training and Art Education

Throughout his teens and into early adulthood, Waterhouse would assist his father in the studio. This enhanced his passion for art further. In 1870, he became a student at the Royal Academy of Art school. Initially, he studied as a sculptor. He then switched courses to study painting. Although he is known as a Pre-Raphaelite painter, his earlier works were not in this style.

However, his paintings did have a classical theme. His early works were often compared to those of Frederic Leighton and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. He chose to exhibit his work at the Society of British Artists and the Dudley Gallery.

## Early Paintings

Waterhouse's *Sleep and His Half-Brother* was exhibited in 1884 in the summer exhibition at the Royal Academy. Following the success of this painting, Waterhouse continued to exhibit at the Royal Academy's exhibition every year until 1916. The only exceptions to this were in 1890 and 1915.

His work gained popularity and Waterhouse made an impact on the London art scene. This led to his work *After the Dance* being allocated the prime position in the summer exhibition of 1876. After his success, Waterhouse's paintings began to get larger. John William Waterhouse was a member of the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour from 1883 to 1889, in spite of the fact that most of his work was painted in oils.

In 1884, Waterhouse submitted his work *Consulting the Oracle* to the Royal Academy. This piece received excellent reviews from art critics and Sir Henry Tate purchased the painting. Sir Henry Tate became a fan of Waterhouse's paintings and later purchased *The*







Lady of Shalott, a painting Waterhouse exhibited in the 1888 Royal Academy exhibition. During the mid-1880s, Waterhouse exhibited many of his works at the Grosvenor Gallery. He also exhibited his work in galleries in some of the other major cities in England, such as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. Some of his art, including Mariamne, were also exhibited abroad. This was part of the international symbolist movement.

### **Personal Life**

Very little else is known about his personal life as there are very few artifacts from his life to fill in the blanks. The only known historical documents linked to Waterhouse are letters detailing who modeled for his work. These included Mary Lloyd and Angelo Colrossi. The former was a model who sat for Flaming June, a masterpiece by Lord Leighton. The latter was an Italian model who sat for many Victorian artists, including Burne-Jones, Leighton, Millais, Watts and Sargent.

### **Marriage**

Waterhouse married Esther Kenworthy in 1883. His wife was the daughter of an art schoolmaster. She had artistic talents herself and had exhibited her work at the Royal Academy. These consisted predominantly of flower paintings. The couple lived together over his Primrose studios. First at number three and then later at number six. Their homes were later occupied by artists including Patrick Caulfield and Arthur Rackham. Although the couple had two children together, they both tragically died in childhood.

### **Career Highlights**

The Lady of Shalott was one of the first of Waterhouse's paintings that demonstrated

his interest in Pre-Raphaelite themes, such as powerful or tragic femme fatales. He actually produced three different versions of this painting in 1888, 1894 and 1916. Some other examples of Waterhouse's paintings that followed the femme fatale theme include Cleopatra, Circe Invidiosa, several versions of Lamia and La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

In addition to painting, Waterhouse also taught art at St. John's Wood Art School. In 1895, he was elected the status of Academician. Byam Shaw, a neo-Pre-Raphaelite artist, was among his students. Waterhouse served on the Royal Academy Council and joined the St. John's Wood Arts Club.

For his diploma work, Waterhouse had intended to submit A Mermaid. Unfortunately, he did not complete the painting in time and chose to submit his Ophelia of 1888 instead. Waterhouse did not complete The Mermaid until 1900. Ophelia of 1888 was lost for almost a century but is now part of an art collection owned by Lord Lloyd Webber. This was just the first of his paintings of Ophelia as she became one of his favorite subjects.

It is believed he may have been inspired by the paintings of John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who also painted this subject. Following his painting of Ophelia in 1888, Waterhouse painted different versions of her in 1894 and 1909.

Waterhouse instigated the War Fund in 1900 and any pictures contributed were auctioned at Christie's. For this, Waterhouse produced Destiny and contributed to a theatrical performance. During the final years of his life, Waterhouse continued to paint despite suffering from cancer which had left him frail. Between 1908 and 1914, he painted a series of paintings based on the legend of Persephone. This inspired him to create more work based



on mythology and literature in 1916. These included Isolde, Miranda and Tristram.

## Death

Waterhouse had also planned to paint an additional painting for the Ophelia series. Unfortunately, he never completed this before his death. His final painting was *The Enchanted Garden*. However, this was also unfinished and was found at his easel after his death. The public can see this final painting as it is now on display as part of the collection at the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Liverpool.

John Willian Waterhouse died on February 10th 1917 from cancer, from which he had suffered for several years. His wife, Esther, outlived him by 27 years. She died peacefully in a nursing home in 1944. The couple are laid to rest beside each other at Kensal Green Cemetery, London.

▼ Good Neighbors







▲ The Starry Night

## Vincent van Gogh

*DUTCH, 1853-1890*

Vincent van Gogh was a Dutch post-Impressionist painter known for his vivid colors and emotive, expressionistic style fuelled by a turbulent mind and an unrivaled level of creative flair.

He was born Vincent Willem van Gogh on March 30th 1853 in the small town of Groot-Zundert, a region in Brabant, Netherlands that was near the Dutch-Belgian border. Vincent was son to Anna Cornelia Carbentus and Theodorus van Gogh, a Reverend at the local protestant church. Vincent had two brothers - Cornelius Vincent and Theo, along with three sisters - Willemina (Wil) Jacoba, Anna Cornelia and Elisabeth Huberta.

Vincent's sister, Elisabeth, regarded him as

a sensitive and serious young boy who often preferred to be by himself rather than spending time with his family. As a young boy, he wore clothes and behaved in ways that made him appear strange when compared to his peers from a very young age.

### **School Life**

Vincent attended a local, religious village school between the years of 1861 and 1864 and was generally regarded as a hard-work-



ing, diligent student. Afterwards, from 1864 to 1866 he moved to a boarding school in Zevenbergen where he pursued French, English and German just before he transferred to another school in Tilburg. Sadly, he was forced to leave the school because of his family's financial difficulties.

After this unsettled spell of education, a 16-year old Vincent was sent to a gallery in Hague to work as a junior clerk on July 30, 1869. The gallery, Goupil and Company specialized in 18th and 19th century art, photographic prints, reproductions and contemporary works.



▲ Self Portrait

### **Mental Health Troubles**

From his early life, Vincent was not like any other young boy. What followed were years of troubles and tribulations but there has been seemingly no consensus on his health status. There have been numerous hypotheses that have been advanced by different scholars concerning what he was suffering from including:

**Lead poisoning:** Vincent often used lead-based paint as his painting medium. This is the reason why some scholars still argue that he might have suffered from lead poisoning because of his continued exposure to paint. At some point, Dr. Peyron said that in one of his occasional attacks, he tried poisoning himself by drinking paint, which caused his retinas to swell. This is one of the symptoms of lead poisoning. The effect is that one starts to see light in the form of halos, clearly evidenced in some of his works like *The Starry Night*.

**Bipolar disorder:** Van Gogh had two extreme and competing personalities, one that loved art and the other religion. This was a clear condition since this enthusiasm levels concerning these two interests were often followed by exhaustion and extended bouts of depression.

**Temporal lobe disorder:** In his everyday life, Van Gogh used to experience seizures which Dr. Peyron and Dr. Felix Rey attributed to temporal lobe disorder. His prolonged use of absinthe, an infamous toxic alcoholic drink, aggravated his brain lesion, a condition which he was born with that also caused his epileptic condition.

**Hypergraphia:** Vincent wrote a collection of over 800 letters over his lifetime since hypergraphia is a condition that is said to be symptomised by one feeling the need to continuously write something and specialists link it to epilepsy and mania.

**Sunstroke:** In his time, he loved landscape painting and that meant he spent most of his time outdoors while in the South of France. In his letters, he claims that his bad stomach, cases of nausea and episodes of hostility were as a result of the effects of sunstroke.



## Early Training

Vincent van Gogh, in the fall of 1880, moved to Brussels on his quest to become an artist. By this time, he had no formal education in the field of art but his brother Theo came to his aid and supported him financially to further his dream. As committed as he was, a young Vincent first began with studying on his own, embracing such books as *Cours de dessin* by Charles Bargue and *Travaux des Champs* written by Jean-François Millet. He displayed inspiration from these books in his early works.

Vincent found art to be an escape for him, providing rare moments of mental balance within his early years. Later in 1885, he broke ground and started working on *Potato Eaters*, which is still considered his first true masterpiece. Vincent longed to achieve success in Paris, where his brother Theo was based, but collectors in this region remained more

interested in the established approach of the Impressionists.

In 1886, Vincent packed his things and showed up at Theo's house in the French capital uninvited. Despite the surprise, his supportive brother welcomed him with open arms. This period brought Impressionist art to his attention for the first time. He was captivated by how artists used color and light in ways he had not seen before. This motivated him to begin studying with the likes of Camille Pissarro and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

Since money was tight, Vincent and his friends posed for each other and painted themselves instead of hiring expensive models. He was a passionate young painter and always engaged in critiques with other painters but at the same time he stayed away from anyone who seemed tired of his constant bickering.

### ▼ Night Cafe





## Career Development

In a span of just a decade (1880-1890), Vincent had achieved more than most artists would achieve in their entire lives, starting with drawings and watercolors in the first four years of his career. Whilst Vincent preferred to work alone, he soon realized that in order to make the most of his natural ability, he would have to study and share ideas with other like-minded individuals. Initially he worked alongside Anton Mauve, a renowned Dutch landscape painter in 1881.

In the summer of 1882, Vincent started visiting museums where he met other great artists, which enabled him to expand his knowledge extensively while experimenting with oils. In 1883 he sought solace in the company of peasants and nature and this journey led him to the isolated northern Netherlands town of Drenthe. This small town was frequented by the likes of Mauve and he spent three months there until returning to Nuenen.

For most of 1884 and 1885, Van Gogh remained in Nuenen, focusing on improving his craft, becoming bolder and building his confidence. He specialized in painting landscape, figure and still life. He derived his inspirations for his artworks from the daily lives of peasants and the hardships that they were experiencing.

Van Gogh would then study fellow Dutch artist Frans Hals in detail, helping him to freshen up his work, whilst incorporating inspiration from Eugène Delacroix and Paolo Veronese alongside. He also embraced the work of Peter Paul Rubens, leading him to suddenly move to Antwerp, Belgium in order to view more of this master's work. The artist attended an academy whilst in Antwerp, but is believed to have learnt much more from his time studying the work of these masters

up close.

Vincent quickly grew tired of formal training, leaving for Paris to join his brother Theo. He was now ready to study alongside a number of artists roughly related to the Impressionist movement, namely Camille Pissarro, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Georges Seurat. This period of discovery brought about changes in his brushwork, bringing in a more vibrant palette. In 1887, he painted many more artworks in purer colors and his Impressionist style crystallized in early 1888. The masterpieces *Self-Portrait in Front of the Easel* and *Portrait of Père Tanguy* are good examples of this new approach.

February 1888, Vincent grew tired of city life and moved to Arles, Southern France, "to look at nature under a brighter sky." The following 12 months of his career were full of paintings depicting blossoming fruit trees, self-portraits, views of towns and portraits of Roulin the postman among other friends, plus landscapes and sunflowers. His style grew more instinctive and spontaneous over time, evolving from his earlier use of more traditional styles, adding greater intensity and movement. His hopes of forming a separate Impressionist group in Arles with Toulouse-Lautrec and Gauguin collapsed due to their considerable artistic differences. Vincent's volatile personality led to heated arguments with Paul Gauguin - sources have claimed that he even chased after his colleague with a razor and ended up cutting the lower half of his own left ear on Christmas Eve, 1888.

Van Gogh returned home two weeks later to continue his work where he created paintings such as *La Berceuse* and *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe* plus a number of still lifes. His deteriorating mental health caught







up with him again and finally he voluntarily committed himself to the Saint-Rémy-de-Provence asylum, where he was placed under medical supervision. After 12 months of horror and recurrent haunting attacks, he would produce further works such as *The Starry Night*, *Cypresses*, *Les Alpilles*, and *Garden of the Asylum*.

### **Death**

As Vincent's depression spiraled out of control, partly fuelled by his deep feelings of loneliness, he sought out his brother Theo. His mental health continued to worsen and he consequently chose to take his own life. After shooting himself, he would pass away two days later.

### **Legacy**

Vincent van Gogh's legacy is vast and multifaceted, encompassing his influence on the development of modern art, his place in popular culture, and his status as an enduring icon of the artist as a tormented genius. This was all achieved without any commercial success during his own lifetime or the slightest encouragement by the wider art community.

Van Gogh continues to be celebrated for the striking use of color and form in his paintings, which broke with the traditional artistic conventions found in previous centuries and helped pave the way for the contemporary art movements of the 20th century. His paintings were a bridge between Impressionism and Expressionism, and his influence can be seen in the work of countless artists who followed him. His unique style, marked by bold colors and thick, unrefined brushstrokes, has become a hallmark of modern art and a source of inspiration for painters in the present era.

Van Gogh's paintings are also celebrated

for their emotional intensity and their ability to capture the beauty and wonder of the natural world. His landscapes, portraits, and still lifes reflect his deep empathy for the human condition and his fascination with the world around him. His emphasis on subjective emotion over objective reality foreshadowed the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the 20th century, and his legacy continues to influence contemporary art today.







