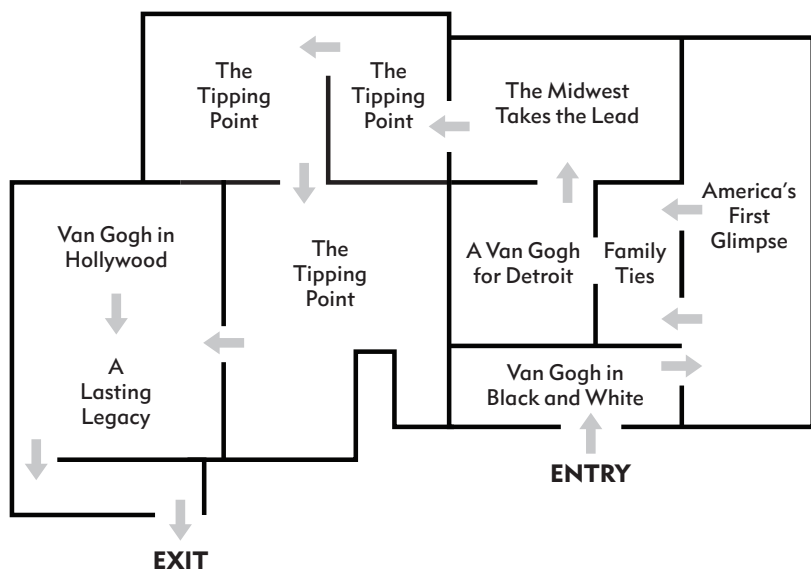


VAN GOGH IN AMERICA

DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS


EXHIBITION MAP




Front cover: Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890), *Stairway at Auvers* (detail), 1890. Oil on canvas; 19 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (50 × 70.5 cm). Saint Louis Art Museum, museum purchase, 1:1935.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide supplements the *Van Gogh in America* gallery experience. In addition to the wall texts in the galleries, it includes illustrated entries on select works in the exhibition. These provide information about Vincent van Gogh's life and creative process as well as behind-the-scenes details about the exhibition and collecting histories of featured works in the United States. The guide is organized in sections that follow the layout of the show.

Please look for the icon  on the gallery labels and match the numbers there to the entries in this guide.

USING AUDIO

Please look for the icon  on the gallery labels and dial 313-305-1390 followed by the stop number to listen to the youth and adult audio stories.

VAN GOGH IN AMERICA

It is difficult to imagine a time when the United States did not embrace the work of Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853–1890). Yet his rise to fame in this country was neither straightforward nor immediate. Despite Van Gogh’s popularity in Europe—especially in Germany—following his premature death, it took forward-thinking individuals decades to familiarize Americans with his work. His path to posthumous stardom involved a series of false starts, convincing forgeries, repeatedly missed opportunities, and courageous decisions, as well as sensationalized tales in print and on screen.

Van Gogh in America celebrates the Detroit Institute of Arts’ status as the first American museum to purchase a painting by the artist. It also commemorates the hundred-year anniversary of that historic acquisition. This exhibition is the first to chronicle the events and people that introduced Van Gogh to the United States, a country he never visited. The story begins over 20 years after the artist’s death and culminates in the 1950s, with Hollywood transforming him into an icon. And once Van Gogh took hold, his utterly original vision captured the popular imagination and never let go.

Unless otherwise noted, all works are by Vincent van Gogh.

1

Van Gogh's Chair, 1888

Oil on canvas; $36 \frac{1}{8} \times 28 \frac{3}{4}$ in. (91.8 × 73 cm)

The National Gallery,
London, bought, Courtauld
Fund, 1924, NG3862



The objects Van Gogh depicts in this painting convey the simplicity he sought in life and in art. The work can also be considered a self-portrait. Although Van Gogh does not include his own figure, he registers his presence through his plain pine chair and touchingly simple personal effects: his pipe, a pouch of tobacco, and a crate of onions bearing his signature. Yet this portrait in absentia is unmistakably Van Gogh, instantly recognizable as his creation.

Van Gogh's Chair was included in a number of exhibitions in the United States in the early 1920s, where it was available for sale. Despite being illustrated in *Vogue* magazine in conjunction with the artist's first American retrospective exhibition in 1920, the painting did not find a home in the US. It was purchased for the Tate Gallery, London, in 1924 and was subsequently transferred to the National Gallery, London.

VAN GOGH IN BLACK AND WHITE

Van Gogh's work was exhibited in the United States for the first time in 1913. Before this, short of traveling to Europe, Americans could only read about his paintings and view them in black-and-white photographs such as the ones reproduced on the wall in this room.

Several groundbreaking European exhibitions in the first decade of the twentieth century, which included works by Van Gogh, attracted newspaper coverage in the United States. Books in English began to appear that introduced Van Gogh to the American public, often promoting a distorted, romanticized view of the artist as a tragic hero rather than focusing on his artistic achievements and skill.

Together, these black-and-white print materials may have served as an introduction to Van Gogh, but they could never have prepared Americans for the vibrancy and vitality of the master colorist's art.

AMERICA'S FIRST GLIMPSE

Van Gogh's work debuted publicly in the United States at the International Exhibition of Modern Art, which opened in 1913 at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York City. The Armory Show, as it is commonly known, introduced audiences to the radical developments taking place in modern art. The massive exhibition—including over 1,300 European and American objects—sparked extensive commentary among visitors and in the press. A smaller version traveled to Chicago and Boston.

The Armory Show included at least 21 Van Gogh works; a selection of those that have been identified are on view in this room. One reviewer noted that some of the artist's paintings were "much studied and wondered over"; a less enthusiastic critic wrote him off as a "moderately competent Impressionist, who was heavy-handed, had little if any sense of beauty and spoiled a lot of canvas with crude, quite unimportant pictures." Most of the paintings were available for purchase, but none sold—a sign of lackluster interest among American buyers.

2

Undergrowth with Two Figures, 1890

Oil on canvas;

19 ½ × 39 ¼ in.

(49.5 × 99.7 cm)

Cincinnati Art

Museum, bequest of

Mary E. Johnston,

1967.1430



This forest scene, portraying a diminutive couple amid a hypnotic mass of violet trees, was painted on an elongated canvas. Van Gogh often used this format at the end of his career while living in Auvers-sur-Oise; this work was completed just one month before his death in July 1890.

The complicated sale history of *Undergrowth with Two Figures* exemplifies the early difficulties Van Gogh paintings experienced in America. The Van Gogh family lent it to the Armory Show, where it was offered for sale for over \$10,000—an amount comparable to prices for paintings in the exhibition by Impressionist Claude Monet (who had already received significant attention from the American market). It returned to Europe unsold and was exhibited numerous times before Boston collector Gilbert E. Fuller finally purchased it in 1929.

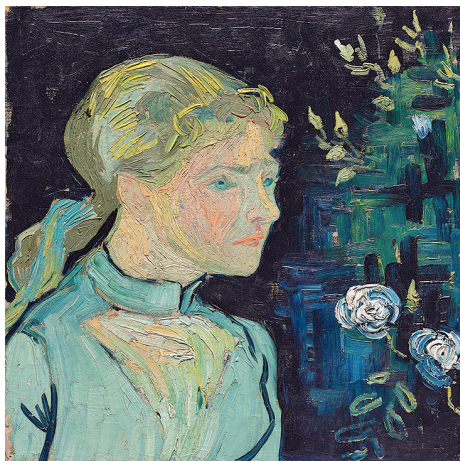
3

Adeline Ravoux, 1890

Oil on fabric; 19 ¾ ×

19 ⅞ in. (50.2 × 50.5 cm)

The Cleveland Museum of
Art, bequest of Leonard C.
Hanna Jr., 1958.31



In May 1890 Van Gogh moved to Auvers-sur-Oise, a picturesque Paris suburb on the Oise River. He rented a room at an inn, and it was there that he died two months later from injuries after shooting himself. This portrait is one of three that Van Gogh made of Adeline Ravoux, the innkeeper's eldest daughter.

American artist Katherine S. Dreier purchased this painting following her visit to the 1912 Sonderbund exhibition in Cologne, Germany, which included over 125 Van Gogh works and served as a model for Armory Show organizers. For Dreier, seeing his art there was like "stepping out of a stuffy room into glorious bracing air." She lent this painting to the Armory Show and to other exhibitions in the early 1920s, including one in Detroit in 1922.

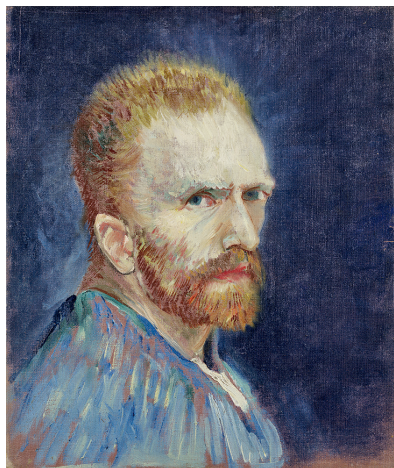
Along with other early collectors Albert C. Barnes and John Quinn, Dreier was ahead of the curve—only in the mid-to-late 1920s did private collectors in the United States truly embrace the artist.

4

Self-Portrait, 1887

Oil on canvas; 15 $\frac{15}{16}$ x
13 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (40.3 x 34 cm)

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum
of Art, Hartford, gift of Philip L.
Goodwin in memory of his mother,
Josephine S. Goodwin, 1954.189



Often unable to pay for professional models, Van Gogh resorted to painting and drawing himself—nearly 40 times. The majority of his self-portraits, including this one, were made when he lived in Paris. He regarded these works as experiments in technique and color rather than as faithful representations.

This was just the second Van Gogh painting to enter an American collection. New York attorney and modern art advocate John Quinn acquired it in September 1912, several months after Philadelphia pharmaceutical tycoon Albert C. Barnes had purchased a portrait of the postman Joseph Roulin, another version of which is in this exhibition. *Self-Portrait* received considerable exposure once in Quinn's possession, appearing in 1913 in the first US exhibition to include Van Gogh's work and, in the early 1920s, in two group shows at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

FAMILY TIES

Throughout his artistic career, Van Gogh enjoyed the devoted support of his younger brother Theo, an art dealer based in Paris. Upon Vincent's death in 1890, Theo possessed the majority of his brother's artistic output, but he himself died less than six months later. Theo's 28-year-old widow, Johanna (Jo) van Gogh-Bonger, and infant son, Vincent Willem van Gogh, received the collection and the brothers' vast correspondence. Over the years, they strategically published the letters and tirelessly promoted him, not only in Europe but also in America and beyond.

The Van Gogh family—who lived in New York City during World War I—lent some 85 works to exhibitions in the United States between 1913 and 1920. They contributed to the Armory Show in 1913, a small solo exhibition in 1915 at the Modern Gallery in New York, and the artist's first major US gallery show at the Montross Gallery in New York in 1920. All the works on view in this room were part of the Montross exhibition. Of the 85 works displayed at these venues, only three sold—all from the 1920 show and all to a single buyer.

In the early 1920s Americans were still not ready to embrace Van Gogh—especially at the prices that Jo and the European market had already established for his work. But it wasn't just the prices that turned people off. An art critic's analysis following the Montross Gallery exhibition explains the impasse: "Van Gogh's day in America is not yet. Almost more than any other modern painter he is felt

to be an alien. Yet there is no other painter of the present day, excepting possibly [Paul] Gauguin, whose appeal is so simple and direct. It is just this simplicity that makes him appear strange.”

5

The Sower, 1888

Oil on canvas; 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ x
16 in. (33.7 x 40.6 cm)

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles,
The Armand Hammer Collection,
gift of Dr. Armand Hammer,
AH.91.42



6

The Sower, 1888

Oil on canvas; 12 $\frac{13}{16}$ x
15 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (32.5 x 40.3 cm)

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
(Vincent van Gogh Foundation),
s0029V1962



A deeply spiritual person, Van Gogh had an affinity for the subject of the sower as a symbol of regeneration, life, and the spread of Christianity. He created more than 30 paintings and drawings on this theme, two of which are on view here, showing the varied ways in which he treated the subject.

It was perhaps the symbolism of this series that compelled Theodore Pitcairn, a minister from the Philadelphia suburb of Bryn Athyn, to purchase the version of *The Sower* (no. 5) from Van Gogh's first major American gallery show, which was organized by the Montross Gallery in 1920. Out of the 67 works included in that exhibition, Pitcairn also purchased the drawing *Sorrow*, on view in this gallery, as well as a portrait of Adeline Ravoux, a different version of which is on view in the previous room (no. 3). Pitcairn was the only person to buy works from the exhibition.

That Pitcairn purchased this version of *Sower* (no. 5), and not the other one that was also part of the Montross Gallery exhibition (no. 6), reflects the rather conservative tastes of many Americans at the time. Pitcairn's *Sower* (no. 5) adopts more conventional perspective, whereas the other version (no. 6)—the one that went unsold—is much more abstracted, with an unusually cropped tree in the foreground and an exaggeratedly large sun peeking over the horizon.

A VAN GOGH FOR DETROIT

The Van Gogh story in America hit a milestone in 1922: the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) became the first museum in the United States to buy one of the artist's paintings—his now-iconic *Self-Portrait* of 1887. Given that only a select few of Van Gogh's works had even been shown in an American museum by this time, the DIA's purchase was described as "courageous" in the contemporary press.

Soon after the acquisition, the DIA added *Self-Portrait* to its installation of a touring exhibition of avant-garde art organized by the Société Anonyme, an experimental museum founded by artists Katherine S. Dreier, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray. A number of the objects featured in that exhibition are on view in this room. The DIA expanded the show to include its own recent acquisitions, as well as loans of works by the "big three" Post-Impressionists—Van Gogh, his painter friend Paul Gauguin, and Paul Cézanne—pictures that seemed almost old-fashioned in comparison to the more recent abstract and avant-garde paintings on display.

7

Self-Portrait, 1887

Oil on artist board mounted to wood panel; 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (34.9 x 26.7 cm)

Detroit Institute of Arts, City of
Detroit Purchase, 22.13



On the evening of January 31, 1922, the Detroit Institute of Arts made history when Ralph H. Booth, president of the City of Detroit Arts Commission, attended the New York auction of dealer Dikran Kelekian's collection and, on behalf of the museum, successfully bid on Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait*. The DIA, founded in 1885, was augmenting its holdings in anticipation of a new, larger building that would open its doors in 1927.



Fig. 1. Artist unknown. *Still Life: Melon, Fish, Jar*, n.d. Oil on panel; 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (55.2 x 46.3 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago.

Initially displayed among the Old Master paintings in the DIA's original building on Jefferson Avenue, *Self-Portrait* "held its own," according to one account. When presented in an exhibition of avant-garde European and American art at the DIA in 1922, this work was joined by two others attributed to Van Gogh: Katherine S. Dreier's *Adeline Ravoux* (no. 3) and a still life borrowed from Frederic Clay Bartlett of Chicago (now recognized as inauthentic; fig. 1).

Henri Matisse

French, 1869–1954

The Window, 1916

Oil on canvas; 57 ½ × 46 in. (146.1 × 116.8 cm)

Detroit Institute of Arts, City of

Detroit Purchase, 22.14



The DIA purchased this painting, the one by Raoul Dufy on view nearby, and three drawings by other artists at the same 1922 auction where Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* was acquired. The DIA included all of them in an exhibition of avant-garde art held at the museum that year. The non-realistic and sketchy (and for some, unfinished) treatment of subject matter in *The Window* particularly generated local controversy.

In a letter published in the *Detroit Times*, the DIA curator responded to criticism of the Matisse acquisition, stating that “for the benefit of those who are enthusiastic about it and see something in it, we feel that it is worth while to keep it.”

THE MIDWEST TAKES THE LEAD

By the late 1920s attitudes toward Van Gogh had changed. When New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) opened its doors in 1929, its inaugural exhibition celebrated the "pioneers" of modern art: Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, and Van Gogh. The show, organized by MoMA's founding director, Alfred H. Barr Jr., included an impressive number of works on loan from private American collections. This led one critic to comment that although "American collectors came late to Van Gogh their power is so embracing that, their minds once made up, they get what they want."

The enthusiasm of private collectors—including Albert C. Barnes (Merion, PA) and Duncan Phillips (Washington, DC), who granted some degree of access to their collections—was not matched by their institutional counterparts. The only museums that owned Van Gogh paintings to lend to the MoMA show were the Detroit Institute of Arts, which owned *Self-Portrait* (no. 7), and the Art Institute of Chicago, which had been given four paintings thought to be by Van Gogh, but lent just two to the exhibition—*The Bedroom* (no. 9) and a still life (later discovered to be inauthentic; p. 14, fig. 1). And the Midwest would maintain this edge: the next four Van Goghs to be purchased by public US museums, all on view in this room, were acquired by Midwestern institutions: the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, the Saint Louis Art Museum, and the Toledo Museum of Art.

The Bedroom, 1889

Oil on canvas; 29 ×

36 ⅞ in. (73.6 × 92.3 cm)

The Art Institute of Chicago,
Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial
Collection, 1926.417



In February 1888 Van Gogh moved to Arles in the South of France. Six months later he took up residence in the rented rooms of a building he named the Yellow House. His bedroom, located on the second floor, became his sanctuary, and he began painting it on October 16, 1888. The following year, after a flood damaged the original work, which is now in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, he made this version. He also painted a smaller, third canvas (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) as a gift for his mother and sister.

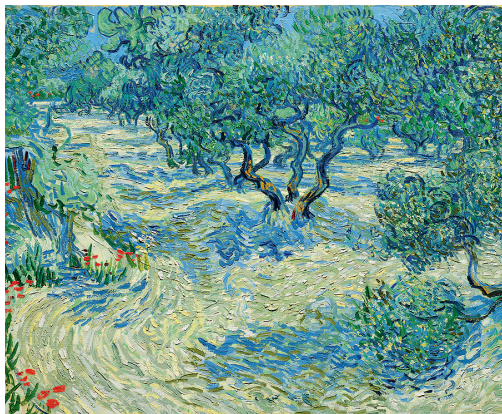
Following Detroit's purchase of *Self-Portrait* (no. 7), the next Van Goghs to enter an American museum came through a gift. Frederic Clay Bartlett donated *The Bedroom* to the Art Institute of Chicago—in addition to three other works said to be by Van Gogh. This was part of a remarkable donation of some 25 paintings, including Georges Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884* (1884/86).

10

Olive Trees, 1889

Oil on canvas; 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ x
36 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (73 x 92.1 cm)

The Nelson-Atkins
Museum of Art,
Kansas City, purchase,
William Rockhill
Nelson Trust, 32-2



Van Gogh was fascinated by the trees outside the psychiatric hospital in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, where he sought treatment in 1889 following a series of mental health crises. As a patient, he continued painting, including at least 15 canvases of the nearby olive groves, a subject he explored once he was allowed to venture beyond the walls of the premises. He enjoyed the challenge of capturing the knotty, twisted trees and the light filtering through the leaves.

The artist's paintings of this subject were among the first to be exhibited in the United States: two were included in the 1913 Armory Show. This work was purchased in 1932 for the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art in Kansas City, partially in response to a petition signed by some 200 advocates who specifically wanted the museum to purchase a work by Van Gogh. It was only the second Van Gogh painting purchased by an American public museum.

THE TIPPING POINT

In 1935 the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) organized Van Gogh's first American museum retrospective. It presented about 127 works, drawn primarily from the collections of Vincent Willem van Gogh, the artist's nephew, and Netherlands-based modern art collector Helene Kröller-Müller. The exhibition came on the heels of the 1934 publication of Irving Stone's *Lust for Life*, a novel based on the life of the artist. This best seller captured the public's imagination and galvanized interest in Van Gogh.

MoMA's exhibition was a sensation. The show generated spectacular attendance in New York as well as at the four other scheduled American venues. Over 50 museums clamored to be added to the tour, but the exhibition was only able to travel, in reduced form, to five additional stops, one of which was the Detroit Institute of Arts. The works of art on view in this and the next two rooms appeared in or echo themes from the blockbuster MoMA show.

By the end of the tour in 1937, nearly one million visitors had taken the opportunity to see Van Gogh's works in person. America was hooked.

11

Ditch along Schenkweg, 1882

Pencil, pen and brush in black ink, gray wash, white opaque watercolor, and traces of squaring on laid paper; $7\frac{1}{4} \times 13\frac{1}{4}$ in. (18.4 × 33.7 cm)

Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, KM 113.904



Over the course of his career, Van Gogh produced more than 1,100 drawings. *Ditch along Schenkweg* is the earliest work in this exhibition, created almost two years after Van Gogh decided to become an artist. It was probably one of 12 drawings of townscapes depicting The Hague, the Netherlands, that his uncle, an art dealer, commissioned from him in 1882.

This is one of more than 30 early drawings that Helene Kröller-Müller lent to the MoMA retrospective. The number of early works—especially drawings—presented in the exhibition signaled the organizers' desire to show Americans all aspects of the artist's career.

12

The Wounded Veteran, about 1882–83

Graphite, brown ink, black ink
and wash, and white gouache on
heavily textured white wove paper;
18 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 10 $\frac{13}{16}$ in. (46 × 27.5 cm)

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg
Museum, Cambridge, bequest of
Meta and Paul J. Sachs, 1965.289



Van Gogh saw drawing as “the root of everything.” With little formal training, he largely taught himself through the act of drawing, which, since the Renaissance, was the traditional path for aspiring artists to hone their craft. Frequent sitters early in his career were his romantic partner Sien Hoornik and her family, as well as residents of the Dutch Reformed Home for the Elderly in The Hague, including Adrianus Zuyderland, the war veteran depicted here.

Before the 1935 MoMA retrospective, this work had already been on public view in America at least twice. Meta and Paul J. Sachs had lent it to Harvard University’s Fogg Museum and then to MoMA, both in 1929.

The Potato Eaters, 1885

Lithograph on Japan paper;
image: 10 $\frac{7}{16}$ × 12 $\frac{13}{16}$ in.
(26.5 × 32.5 cm)

Museo Nacional Thyssen-
Bornemisza, Madrid, 558, 1975.9



Although Van Gogh frequently worked on paper, he produced only 10 prints during his 10-year career. This lithograph documents the subject of his first major figure painting, *The Potato Eaters*, which he made in Nuenen, the Netherlands, after he had moved there in 1883 to live with his parents. Before executing this painting of a peasant family, he spent months working on countless studies of heads, two of which are on view nearby. Van Gogh was proud of the final canvas, but it was criticized at the time for its dark colors and the way in which he executed the anatomy of the figures.



Fig. 2. *The Potato Eaters*, 1885. Oil on canvas; 32 × 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (82 × 114 cm). Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation).

The painted version of *The Potato Eaters* (fig. 2) was lent by Vincent Willem van Gogh to MoMA's 1935 retrospective, where it was a highlight. However, the painting was known in America much earlier; it had been reproduced in the *New York Times* in 1912, before Van Gogh's works had ever been shown publicly in the United States.

14

Le Moulin de la Galette, 1886

Oil on canvas;

14 $\frac{15}{16}$ × 18 $\frac{5}{16}$ in.

(38 × 46.5 cm)

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Nationalgalerie, A II 687



This painting shows the Moulin de la Galette, one of the three remaining windmills (*moulins*) on Montmartre, the large hill located in the northern section of Paris where Van Gogh moved in 1886. The Moulin de la Galette, part of a complex that included gardens, a dance hall, and cafés, was located a few blocks from the apartment Van Gogh shared with his brother Theo.

Le Moulin de la Galette was the first Van Gogh to be exhibited on both the East and West Coasts of the United States. Dealer Stephan Bourgeois included it in a group exhibition at his New York gallery in February 1914. The following year he lent it to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, where it was the only Van Gogh on view.

15

Grapes, Lemons, Pears,
and Apples, 1887

Oil on canvas; 18 ¼ ×
21 ¾ in. (46.5 × 55.2 cm)

The Art Institute of Chicago,
gift of Kate L. Brewster, 1949.215



Van Gogh's technique changed significantly after he moved to Paris and began to incorporate vibrant colors and stippled Pointillist brushwork in his paintings. He produced more than 170 still-life paintings over his career as they allowed him to experiment with color and brushwork.

This work was not included in the 1935 MoMA retrospective, but it was on view there in 1929 as part of the institution's inaugural exhibition featuring the works of Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Georges Seurat, and Van Gogh. While this painting was lent to the exhibition by Mr. and Mrs. Walter S. Brewster of Chicago (and later donated to the Art Institute of Chicago), it is notable that in 1929, MoMA was able to borrow Van Gogh's work from only two public institutions—the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Art Institute of Chicago. They were the sole public museums in America that then had accepted works by Van Gogh into their permanent collections.

16

Fishing Boats on the Beach at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, 1888

Oil on canvas; 25 $\frac{5}{16}$ x 32 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (65 x 81.5 cm)

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation), s0028V1962



In February 1888 Van Gogh moved to Arles, a small coastal town in Provence in the South of France. In May of that year, he made an excursion to the picturesque village of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer on the Mediterranean coast, not far from Arles. His intention was “just to see a blue sea and a blue sky” and to focus on “a more deliberate and exaggerated way of drawing.” Because the fishing boats departed early and quickly every morning, Van Gogh made this painting based on a drawing he had executed on the spot.

This was one of the approximately 20 works that Vincent Willem van Gogh lent to the 1935 MoMA retrospective. Because of previous commitments, they could only travel to the first five venues of the tour, after which the retrospective continued on in a reduced version.

17

Entrance to the Public Gardens in Arles, 1888

Oil on canvas; 28 ½ × 35 ¾ in. (72.4 × 90.8 cm)

The Phillips Collection,
Washington, DC,
acquired 1930, 0796



Soon after his arrival in Arles, Van Gogh rented rooms in a residence he called the Yellow House, which he planned to transform into an artist collective. A preferred subject during Van Gogh's time there was the public garden directly across the street from the Yellow House, the entrance of which is documented here.

This painting was acquired by modern art collector Duncan Phillips of Washington, DC, in 1930. He had previously bought another work thought to be by Van Gogh, but after its attribution was questioned, he returned it to the dealer in exchange for *Women Crossing the Fields*, which is also in this exhibition. Phillips went on to exchange that painting and three works by other artists in partial trade for *Entrance to the Public Gardens in Arles*—a transaction that documents a tremendous rise in value for Van Gogh's work in the United States in the late 1920s.

Harvest in Provence, 1888

Watercolor, gouache, charcoal, reed and quill pen, and brown ink on off-white wove paper laid down on mill board; 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 24 in. (50.5 x 61 cm)

Private Collection,
courtesy of Heather James
Fine Art, Palm Desert



In Arles, Van Gogh hoped to take inspiration from the region's vibrant colors and dazzling light. This watercolor is one he made from a vantage point just outside Arles, probably the mill featured in his painting *House on the Crau* (*The Old Mill*) on view nearby.

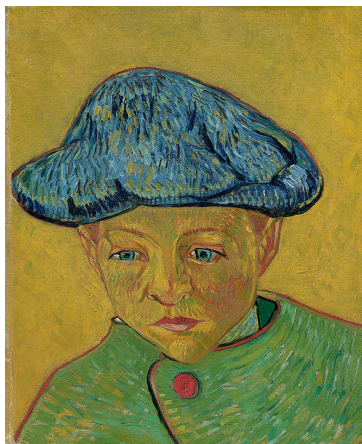
Harvest in Provence was illustrated in *Vincent*, German art critic Julius Meier-Graefe's fictionalized biography of Van Gogh. The English translation was released in an abridged popular edition later in the 1920s. A precursor to Irving Stone, the author of *Lust for Life*, Meier-Graefe promoted the image of Van Gogh as a tormented genius who "saved every breath that was in him for his work."

Portrait of Camille Roulin, 1888

Oil on canvas; 17 × 13 ¾ in.

(43.2 × 34.9 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee, 1973, 1973-129-1



In early December 1888 Van Gogh wrote from Arles to his brother Theo, “I’ve done the portraits of *an entire family*, the family of the postman whose head I did before—the man, his wife, the baby, the young boy, and the 16-year-old son.” This portrait is of the “young boy,” named Camille, the second son of Joseph and Augustine Roulin, whose portraits are also on view in this room.

Art collector, dealer, and New York Philharmonic director Josef Stransky purchased this painting in 1920, when Van Gogh’s art was still struggling to gain traction in the American market. He sold it the following year to Marius de Zayas, who exhibited it at his gallery as well as at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Dallas Art Association, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. No buyer materialized, and De Zayas sold it at auction in 1923. Stransky later reacquired the painting and lent it to the 1935 MoMA retrospective.

Lullaby: Madame Augustine
Roulin Rocking a Cradle
(*La Berceuse*), 1889

Oil on canvas; 36 ½ × 28 ⅝ in.
(92.7 × 72.7 cm)

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,
bequest of John T. Spaulding, 48.548



Van Gogh made five versions of this portrait of Augustine Roulin, the wife of his friend Joseph, a postal worker in Arles. Here, Madame Roulin holds one end of a rope. The other is tied to a cradle out of view, which allows her to rock their infant daughter Marcelle.

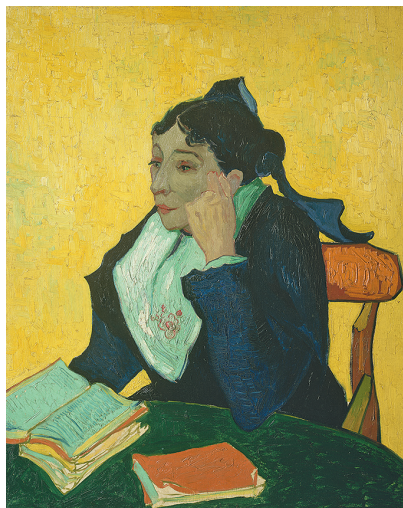
One version (now in the Kröller-Müller Museum) appeared in the 1935 MoMA retrospective, but the subject had already reached America. In 1915 another was exhibited at the Modern Gallery in New York. Frederic Clay Bartlett's version (purchased in 1923) was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago as early as 1923 and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Boston Art Club in 1925.

Three of the five paintings of Madame Roulin are now in American museums, all donated by private collectors. Boston business executive John T. Spaulding purchased this one in 1928 and gave it to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1948.

L'Arlésienne: Madame
Joseph-Michel Ginoux
(Marie Julien, 1848–1911),
1888–89

Oil on canvas; 36 × 29 in.
(91.4 × 73.7 cm)

The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York, bequest of
Sam A. Lewisohn, 1951, 51.112.3



On arrival in Arles, Van Gogh initially rented a room at the Hôtel-Restaurant Carrel, then moved to the Café de la Gare, run by Marie Ginoux and her husband, Joseph-Michel. Here Madame Ginoux is dressed in the regional dress of an *Arlésienne* (a woman from Arles), as she would in other portraits by both Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin.

German American business executive Adolph Lewisohn purchased *L'Arlésienne* in 1926 through his art advisor Stephan Bourgeois, and it appeared in no fewer than eight New York exhibitions by the time it graced the cover of the catalogue of the 1935 MoMA retrospective. Already by 1929, one critic wrote of the work, "No Van Gogh group could be called really worthy that did not contain the grand *L'Arlésienne* (Mme. Ginoux)... She is present, with her unconquerable vitality and the splendor of her yellow background."

L'Arlésienne, Madame
Ginoux, 1890

Oil on canvas; 25 $\frac{5}{16}$ × 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.
(65 × 54 cm)

Private Collection



A few months after Paul Gauguin's stay in Arles, Van Gogh voluntarily sought treatment at a psychiatric hospital in nearby Saint-Rémy-de-Provence. There his mental health fluctuated, yet he continued painting. One subject he revisited was the likeness of the *Arlésienne* Marie Ginoux (no. 21). The source for these later depictions of Madame Ginoux was a drawing that Gauguin had made of her and left behind when he fled the Yellow House. But Van Gogh took some creative liberties; he included two books that were important to him—French translations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. In this way he inserted himself into Gauguin's composition.

The Thannhauser Galleries offered to sell this version of Madame Ginoux to the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1928, but the museum did not pursue the acquisition. In 1929 the painting found a home with Drs. Harry and Ruth Bakwin of New York; they lent the work to both the 1929 and 1935 MoMA exhibitions.

23

The Olive Trees, 1889

Oil on canvas; 28 $\frac{5}{8}$ x
36 in. (72.6 x 91.4 cm)

The Museum of
Modern Art, New York,
Mrs. John Hay Whitney
Bequest, 1998



During Van Gogh's time in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, he painted 15 paintings of the olive groves that surrounded the psychiatric hospital where he stayed for a year.

Sam van Deventer, secretary of the Kröller-Müller Foundation, which had amassed the second-largest collection of Van Gogh works, lent *The Olive Trees* to the MoMA retrospective. For the tour's triumphal finale in New York in January 1937, several works were added, including this painting's nocturnal companion, *The Starry Night*, lent by a Rotterdam collector. When MoMA purchased *The Starry Night* in 1941, it was celebrated as the first canvas by the painter to be acquired by a New York museum.

24

Poppy Field, 1890

Oil on canvas; 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ x
36 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (73 x 91.5 cm)

Kunstmuseum Den Haag,
The Hague, long-term loan
Cultural Heritage Agency
of the Netherlands,
SCH-1948x0003



Van Gogh left the hospital at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in May 1890 and settled in Auvers-sur-Oise, where he was captivated by the lush fields. On June 14, 1890, he reported to his brother, "Currently I'm working on a field of poppies." Fields of wheat, however, were his most frequent subject in this period, a number of which are on view in this exhibition.

This work was lent to the 1935 MoMA retrospective by Bob Kröller, Helene Kröller-Müller's son, but, hoping to find a buyer, he pulled it from the show, then in Chicago, to send it to an art dealer in New York. At the request of MoMA director Alfred H. Barr Jr., the Kröller-Müller Foundation loaned another of its Van Gogh paintings to the show to hang in its place.

25

Bank of the Oise
at Auvers, 1890

Oil on canvas; 28 ×
36 7/8 in. (71.1 × 93.7 cm)

Detroit Institute of Arts,
bequest of Robert H.
Tannahill, 70.159



In the 70 days prior to his death on July 29, Van Gogh was incredibly productive, making approximately 75 paintings, including this one, as well as more than 30 drawings.

In 1927 Ralph H. Booth, who had purchased Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* (no. 7) on behalf of the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1922, saw this painting at the Thannhauser Galleries. Despite the fact that it was "the finest Van Gogh" he had ever seen, Booth and the DIA did not try to acquire the work. Another DIA patron, Robert H. Tannahill, purchased it in 1935 through the Knoedler Gallery and loaned it to Detroit's presentation of the MoMA traveling retrospective. Tannahill ultimately bequeathed *Bank of the Oise at Auvers* to the DIA in 1970.

VAN GOGH IN HOLLYWOOD

By the 1930s the popular media was inundated with sensationalized accounts of Van Gogh's life story. One particularly vocal critic decried the tabloid-style emphasis on "the frustration, the tragedy, and not the achievements, in a life that was obstinately dogged by misfortune." A corrective was to let the artist speak through his letters—an approach taken in the catalogue of the Museum of Modern Art's 1935 retrospective. But the "Van Gogh myth" was irrepressible, particularly after director Vincente Minnelli adapted the hugely popular novel *Lust for Life* for the screen. A critical success, the 1956 melodrama further cemented the perception of the artist as a tragic hero, a loner working on the verge of crisis.

Biopics of Van Gogh necessarily featured paintings for visual inspiration and as props, and these films afforded broad mainstream exposure to the artworks selected. The DIA's *Self-Portrait* (no. 7) and other works on view in this room played leading or supporting roles on the silver screen or in the collections of Hollywood studio executives.

Wheat Fields after
the Rain (The Plain
of Auvers), 1890

Oil on canvas; 28 $\frac{7}{8}$ ×
36 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (73.3 × 92.4 cm)

Carnegie Museum of Art,
Pittsburgh, acquired
through the generosity
of the Sarah Mellon
Scaife Family, 68.18



As the biopic *Lust for Life* churns toward its dramatic climax, this canvas appears on-screen, while Van Gogh confesses, “Besides portraits, I’ve been doing some landscapes. I have a feeling of being surer of my brush than ever before, so I work in haste as a miner does when he knows he’s facing disaster.” But Hollywood was taking license; around the time that Van Gogh painted this work he wrote to his family that he was “wholly in a mood of almost too much calm” and that his canvases “will tell you what I can’t say in words, what I consider healthy and fortifying about the countryside.”

This painting was frequently illustrated in early English-language texts about Van Gogh, notably in Julius Meier-Graefe’s *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Aesthetics* (1908) and *Vincent van Gogh: A Biographical Study* (1922). Decades before *Lust for Life* portrayed Van Gogh as a tragic genius, these publications were already promoting myths that sensationalized the artist’s personal life—that he was a loner in a perpetual state of struggle, fated to sacrifice himself for his art.

27

The Plain of La Crau, 1888

Reed pen and ink with
graphite on paper;

11 ¹³/₁₆ × 18 ⁵/₁₆ in.

(30 × 46.5 cm)

Private Collection, Texas



In May 1888 Van Gogh wrote to his brother, “I sent you some more drawings today . . . They’re views taken from a rocky hill from which you can see in the direction of the Crau (an area from which a very good wine comes), the town of Arles and in the direction of Fontvieille. The contrast between the wild and romantic foreground—and the broad, tranquil distant prospects with their horizontal lines, shading off until they reach the chain of the Alpilles . . . is very picturesque.”

This drawing—one of those invoked in this letter—was formerly in the collection of Harold Hecht, an Academy Award–winning Hollywood film producer. Hecht also owned one of Van Gogh’s paintings based on Gauguin’s drawing of the Arlésienne Marie Ginoux (a different version of which is on view in the previous room; no. 22).

Other Hollywood stars who collected works by Van Gogh were Elizabeth Taylor (whose father was an art dealer), the movie star Errol Flynn, and film noir legend Edward G. Robinson.

Starry Night (Starry Night over the Rhône), 1888

Oil on canvas; 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (73 × 92 cm)

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, gift of M. and Mme Robert Khan-Sriber, in memory of M. and Mme Fernand Moch, 1975, RF 1975-19



Van Gogh's depictions of the night sky are some of his most recognizable. This work—often referred to as *Starry Night* to indicate the location where the artist painted the nocturnal picture—is featured at a dramatic turning point in the film *Lust for Life*. In the scene, Van Gogh paints this work in a frenzy while an impassioned voiceover states, "Sometimes I work on into the night. I'm hardly conscious of myself anymore. And the pictures come to me as in a dream with a terrible lucidity."

Van Gogh's letters that mention this painting, however, offer no indication that it was executed impulsively. The artist sent his brother a sketch of the work, along with meticulous descriptions of the many colors he used, the gas lamp under which he painted, and the important interplay of town lights and sparkling stars in the clear night sky above.

A LASTING LEGACY

In 1920 art critic Henry McBride issued a harsh critique of the lack of interest in Van Gogh in the United States: “During the thirty years’ nap in which our museum directors and collectors have been indulging, amateurs upon the other side of the water have not been asleep . . . To have bolted the doors so long against Van Gogh, to have kept aloof from him during all the years in which he was, so to speak, upon trial, does not appear to throw a pretty light.” Over the next century, America would correct its course, and Van Gogh, who never set foot in this country, now commands universal adoration, and his legacy lives on through the objects he left behind.

The continued fascination with Van Gogh’s work and biography—which has long been mythologized in print and on screen and is recently the subject of popular immersive experiences—is a testament to his enduring appeal, which remains a source of inspiration for filmmakers, musicians, writers, other artists, and art lovers in the United States and around the globe.

VINCENT VAN GOGH (1853–1890): HIS LIFE AND HIS RECEPTION IN AMERICA

Key Dates

- 1853** Born on March 30 in Groot-Zundert, the Netherlands, the eldest of six surviving children of a Protestant minister and a bookbinder's daughter.
- 1869–80** Pursues a variety of career paths without success, with stints as a junior apprentice for an international art dealer in The Hague, London, and Paris; as an assistant teacher in England; at a bookshop in the Netherlands; and as a lay preacher in Belgium.
- 1880** Decides to become an artist.
- 1881** Returns to his parents' home in Etten, the Netherlands, and sets up his first studio. His younger brother Theo (born 1857) begins to support him financially, which allows him to focus on his art.
- 1881–83** Moves to The Hague. Takes painting lessons from Anton Mauve, an established artist who is his cousin by marriage, and receives a commission from his uncle Cornelis "Cor" Marinus van Gogh for a series of drawings.
- 1883–85** Resides in Drenthe and Nuenen, both in the Netherlands. In Nuenen he lives with his parents and paints his first major work, *The Potato Eaters*, in 1885 (see p. 22, fig. 2).

- 1886–88** Moves to Paris, where he resides with Theo. Becomes part of the avant-garde art scene.
- 1888** Relocates from Paris to Arles in the South of France. In September he moves into the Yellow House, where he hopes to establish an artist collective. In October artist Paul Gauguin accepts Van Gogh's invitation and arrives in Arles. Over the following weeks, tensions escalate, and Van Gogh has a mental health crisis, mutilating his left ear on December 23.
- 1889** Voluntarily enters a private psychiatric hospital in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, where he continues to work productively once he recovers sufficiently.
- 1890** Exhibits in group shows in Brussels and Paris.
Moves to Auvers-sur-Oise, near Paris, in May, allowing him to be closer to Theo. Becomes friends with Dr. Paul Gachet, who also advises him on his treatment.
Dies on July 29 in Auvers-sur-Oise, two days after shooting himself.
- 1891** Theo van Gogh dies. His widow, Jo, and son, Vincent Willem, receive Theo's estate, which includes the majority of Vincent van Gogh's works and letters.

- 1908** Julius Meier-Graefe's *Modern Art: Being a Contribution to a New System of Æsthetics* is published in English, with a chapter devoted to Van Gogh and his relationship to other artists of the era.
- 1912** The Sonderbund exhibition, including an extensive section of more than 125 Van Gogh paintings, opens in Cologne, Germany. It galvanizes American artists Arthur B. Davies, Walt Kuhn, and Walter Pach, who will organize the first showing of Van Gogh's work in the United States the following year.
- Albert C. Barnes of Philadelphia, John Quinn of New York, and Katherine S. Dreier of New York are the first Americans to acquire paintings by Van Gogh.
- Excerpts of Van Gogh's letters translated into English are published in the October issue of the quarterly *Camera Work*. The first English translation of a selection of Van Gogh's letters in a book format is released in England the same year and in the United States the following year.
- 1913** Van Gogh's work is seen publicly in the United States for the first time at the International Exhibition of Modern Art (Armory Show), which opens in New York and travels in reduced form to Chicago and Boston.
- Publication of a memoir written by Van Gogh's sister Elisabeth du Quesne-Van Gogh.
- 1915** The first solo Van Gogh show in the United States is held at the Modern Gallery in New York.
- 1920** Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait* (no. 4), owned by John Quinn, is exhibited in a group exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Additional works by the artist will be shown there the following year in group loan exhibitions.

- 1920** The Montross Gallery in New York mounts the first major US gallery retrospective, presenting 67 works from the Van Gogh family collection.
- 1922** The Detroit Institute of Arts buys *Self-Portrait* (no. 7) at auction in New York.
Publication of the English-language edition of Julius Meier-Graefe's *Vincent van Gogh: A Biographical Study*.
- 1925** The Barnes Foundation opens to a select public in Merion, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia. By that time, the foundation owns five works by Van Gogh.
- 1926** Frederic Clay Bartlett's gift of the Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection, including works by Van Gogh, enters the Art Institute of Chicago's collection.
- 1927–29** Publication of *The Letters of Vincent van Gogh to His Brother* in a three-volume English edition translated primarily by Jo van Gogh-Bonger.
- 1928** Jacob-Baart de la Faille compiles the first comprehensive catalogue of Van Gogh's works.
- 1929** *First Loan Exhibition: Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh* opens at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 1934** Publication of Irving Stone's novel *Lust for Life*, a fictionalized biography of Van Gogh.
- 1935–36** The first US museum retrospective of the artist's work, organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, travels across the country.
- 1941** The Museum of Modern Art acquires *The Starry Night*, 1889, the first Van Gogh painting to be purchased by a New York museum.
- 1956** Release of Vincente Minnelli's biopic *Lust for Life*.

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Van Gogh's letters provide informative context about his life and works. All the known surviving letters written and received by the artist are available in English translation at www.vangoghletters.org.

