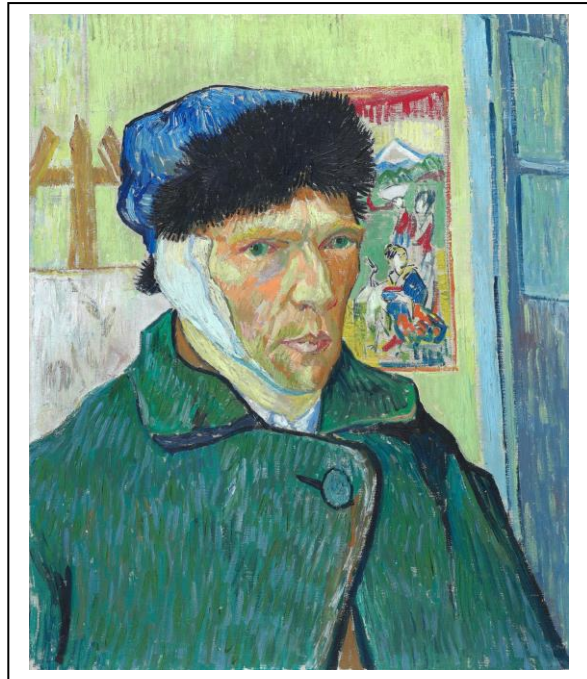


## December 2023 Newsletter

### AN UNTIMELY ACCIDENT



Self-Portrait With Bandaged Ear, 1888, Vincent Van Gogh

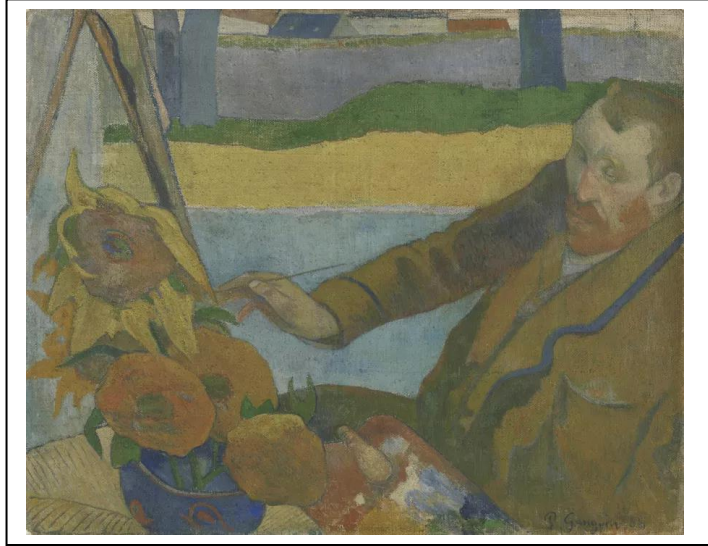
Hello: I hope this finds you well. Last month, I asked for favorite books that people like to reread. I can't think of a better recommendation, so here are the top vote-getters: *Emma*, and *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen, and *Life on the Mississippi*, by Mark Twain.

If you'd like to recommend a book, please let me know and I'll include it in the next newsletter.

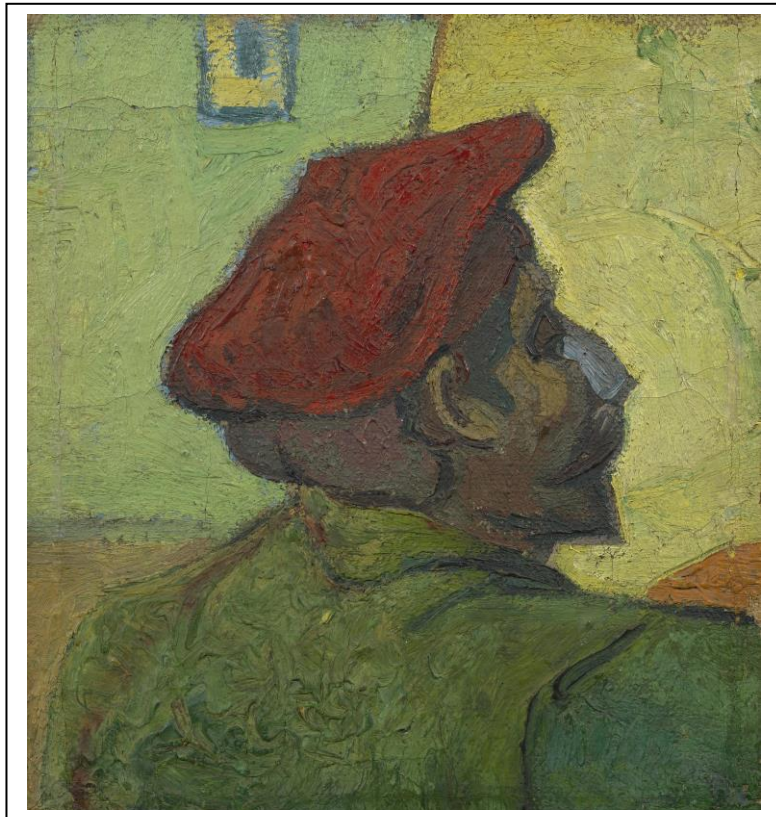
There are promising developments in my current novel-in-progress, "Saving Van Gogh." Vincent Van Gogh suffered his first psychotic episode in December, so I will look into some of the myths surrounding the loss of his ear and the triggering events that led to his admittance in the asylum at Saint-Paul de Mausole, France.

Paul Gauguin, Camille Pissarro, and Georges Seurat had a dramatic influence on Van Gogh's artistic development while living in Paris. Gauguin's visit to Martinique and the paintings he produced in the island setting played a major role in Van Gogh's decision to move away from Paris in search of a more "exotic" setting. Building on these relationships, Van Gogh hoped to

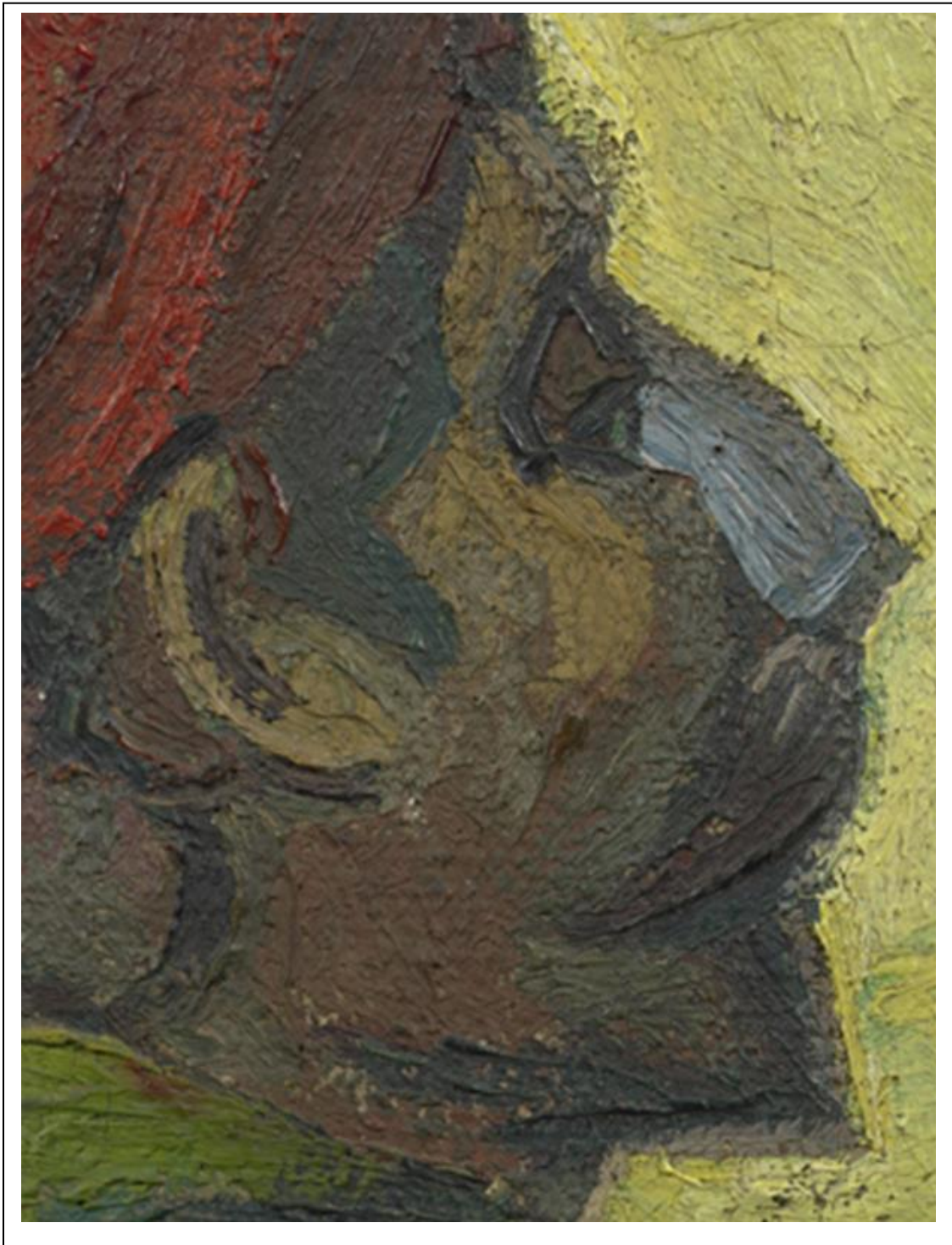
establish an artist colony at Arles in the south of France. Paul Gauguin came to Arles in September 1888, and the two men spent a tumultuous and productive nine weeks together. Van Gogh completed 36 canvases, and Gauguin finished 21 paintings. Here is an example of a painting from both artists from their time together in Arles



Vincent van Gogh Painting Sunflowers, 1888, by Paul Gauguin

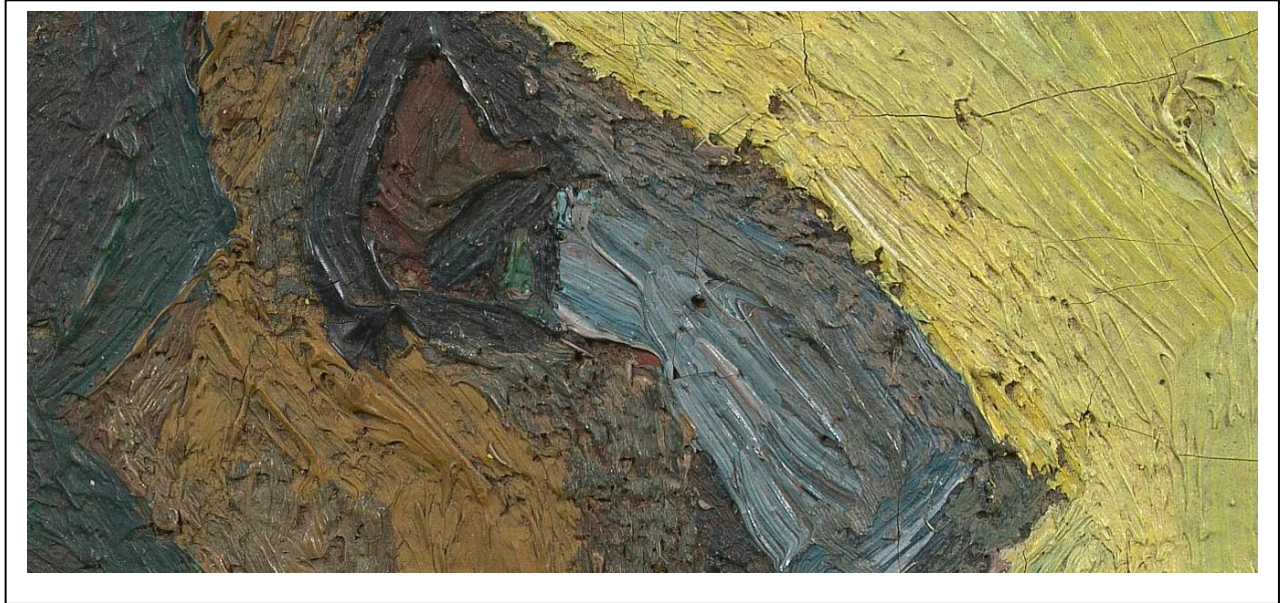


Portrait of Gauguin, 1888, by Vincent van Gogh





Above is a close up showing Van Gogh's distinctive brush strokes and layering techniques. Below is a close up showing the detail in the eye and nose.



Despite the artistic synergy between Van Gogh and Gauguin, their collaboration was doomed because of differing motivations. For Van Gogh, the arrival of one of his mentors was a sign that his idea of forming an artist colony was becoming a reality. For Gauguin, however, it was a way to make enough money to return to Martinique. Theo Van Gogh, Vincent's brother, and Gauguin's art dealer, had promised Gauguin 150 francs a month to move to Arles. Gauguin called Arles, "the dirtiest hole in the South," and told Vincent that he intended to return to the Caribbean, ruining Vincent's dream of establishing an artist colony.

Gauguin's decision to leave Arles had a profound effect on Van Gogh's fragile sanity; his behavior grew increasingly erratic. Van Gogh began standing silently over Gauguin's bed while he slept and spent their shared money on prostitutes and absinthe. One night, after Van Gogh threw a drink at Gauguin's head in a bar, Gauguin finally reached his limit. He told Van Gogh that he was writing to Theo and going back to Paris.

The next day, Gauguin claims that Van Gogh chased after him in the street with a razor blade. Gauguin checked into a hotel rather than return to their shared living quarters. According to police reports, Van Gogh returned to the house and used the razor blade that he had been threatening Gauguin with to cut off his entire left ear. (For more on this, see my [December 2023](#)

[newsletter](#).) Van Gogh then went to a local brothel, asked for a woman named Rachel, and presented the wrapped and bloody ear to her as a keepsake. Auditory hallucinations caused by lead poisoning from paint may have contributed to Van Gogh's erratic behavior. Despite their rocky farewell, both men continued a friendship and exchanged letters until Van Gogh's unfortunate suicide on July 29, 1890.



Please mark your calendars:

I will be speaking about the book Anne and I co-wrote, "Let The Earth Breathe," at 2:30pm on Saturday, January 6, 2024, at the South Central Regional Library, 7300 Jefferson Blvd., Louisville, KY 40219. I will have lots of new pictures and important updates about the expanding Kentucky native plant and seed swap groups.

I will be reading excerpts from my book, "A Promise Moon," and discussing the Underground Railroad in Kentucky at 2pm on Saturday, Feb 3, 2024 at the South Central Regional Library, 7300 Jefferson Blvd., Louisville, KY 40219. The book and presentation evolved from a research grant I received to study the Underground Railroad in Kentucky. The [Kentucky Humanities Speakers Bureau](#) is also sponsoring this talk

This speaking engagement comes with breakfast! Saturday in May or June, I will be reading excerpts from my book, "A Promise Moon," and discussing the Underground Railroad in Kentucky at the Jack Jouett House Historic Site, 255 Craigs Creek Rd. Versailles, KY 40383. The [Kentucky Humanities Speakers Bureau](#) is sponsoring this talk, and I will have more details in my next newsletter.

I hope you've enjoyed this edition of my newsletter. If you haven't already, please take a moment to leave a review on Amazon. It is really helpful with sales. Here is the link to my latest book, "[Stealing Picasso](#)." Thank you.

If you know of anyone who is looking for a speaker, the [Kentucky Humanities Speakers Bureau](#) is great about helping to subsidize appearances. I'm available as a speaker to talk about "[Stealing Renoir](#)," and how World War II was the largest art theft in history.

Or, if Kentucky history is appropriate for audiences, the [Speakers Bureau](#) will subsidize my appearance to discuss the findings from my research grant into the Underground Railroad in Kentucky.

The Speakers Bureau will also subsidize my appearance to talk about gardening with native plants and how this led to the publication of "[Let The Earth Breathe](#)." If you or anyone you know would like to schedule a talk, here's the [link](#).

Meanwhile, if you aren't already a member and are interested in gardening with native plants, here is the link: [Kentucky Native Plants Swap](#). The swaps are free, as are the plants and seeds, and a lot of fun, as you can see by the photos.

[Here is a link to my previous newsletters.](#)

Happy reading.

Stephen Allten Brown

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