

Van Gogh's Nocturne Series



The Starry Night, Van Gogh, 1889

Hello:

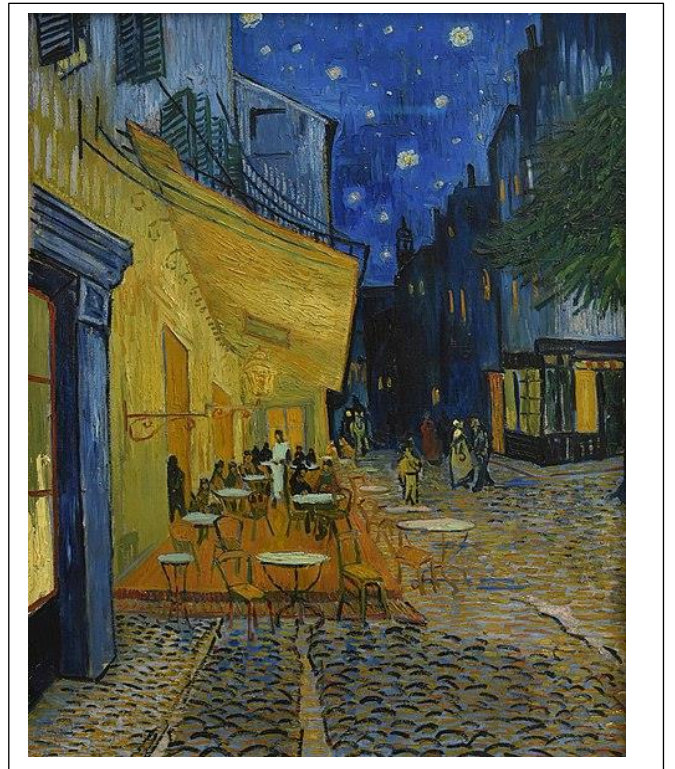
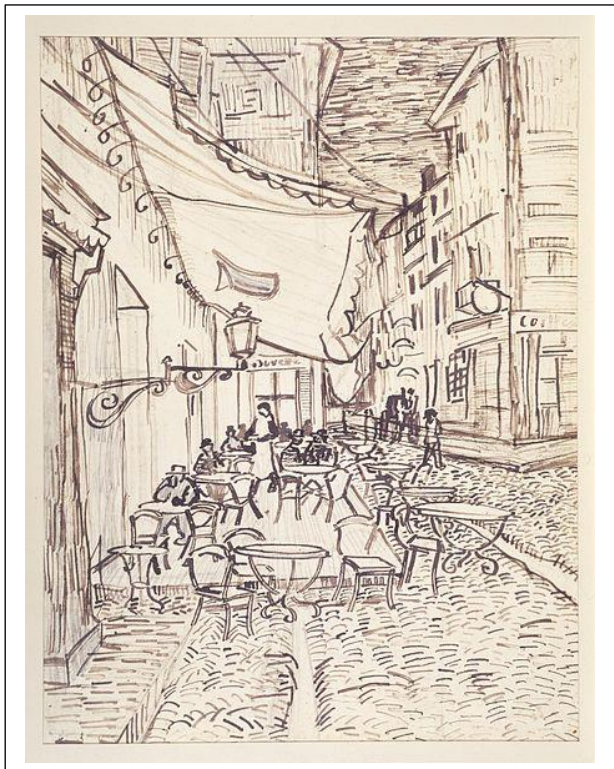
I hope this finds you well.

Vincent Van Gogh's letters offer considerable insight into his artistic development. It's fascinating to learn about what inspired him to create a particular painting. "The Starry Night" is probably his most famous work, and also a featured clue and plot point in my current novel-in-progress, "Saving Van Gogh."

Vincent wrote to his brother Theo on September 28, 1888 and discusses "The Starry Night," offering these insights: ". . . the starry sky at last, actually painted at night, under a gas-lamp. The sky is green-blue, the water is royal blue, the areas of land are mauve. The town is blue and violet. The gaslight is yellow, and its reflections are red gold and go right down to green bronze. Against the green-blue field of the sky the Great Bear has a green and pink sparkle whose discreet paleness contrasts with the harsh gold of the gaslight."

Van Gogh considered this painting to be a failure. ". . . And yet, once again I allowed myself to be led astray into reaching for stars that are too big—another failure—and I have had my fill of that." He is referring to the swirling brushstrokes in the center of the painting pictured above.

Van Gogh painted in series, often producing three or more canvases of a similar scene and/or theme. “The Starry Night,” is the last painting in Van Gogh’s nocturne series. “Café Terrace at Night,” pictured below, is the first in the series and was painted in early September 1888. His preparatory sketch offers further insight into the development of the nocturne theme. (Comparing the stars in “A Starry Night,” to the stars in “Café Terrace at Night,” highlights the evolution of his vision.



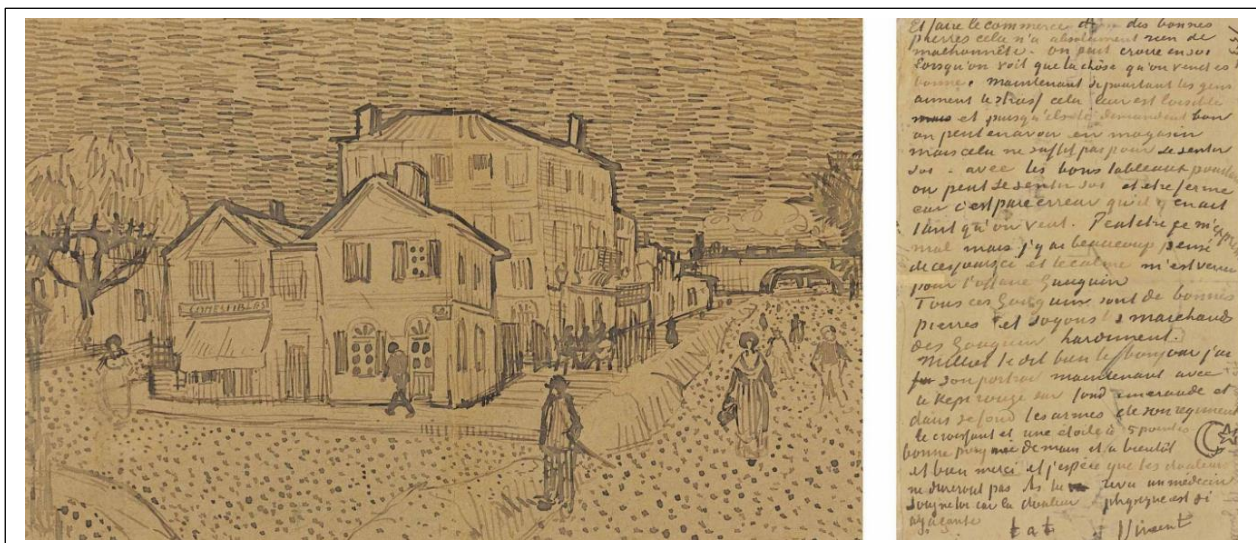
Van Gogh, sketch and painting of Café Terrace at Night, September 1888

In a letter to his sister, in which he discussed “Café Terrace at Night,” he mentions his love of color: “Now there’s a painting of night without black,” he writes. “With nothing but beautiful blue, violet and green, and in these surroundings the lighted square is coloured pale sulphur, lemon green. I enormously enjoy painting on the spot at night.”

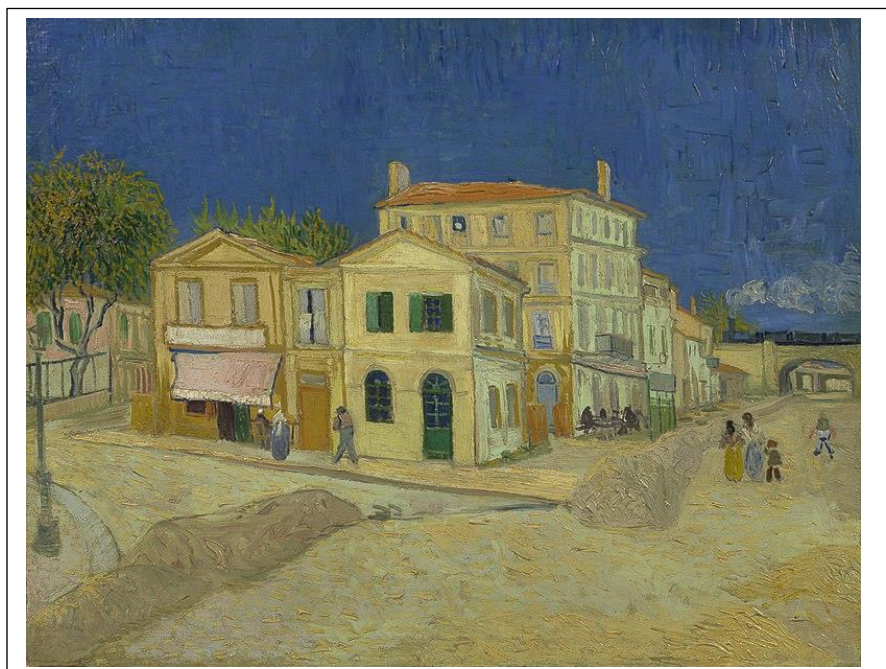
Inspiration, clues, and plot points for “Saving Van Gogh,” often come from unexpected places. The sketch Van Gogh made of the yellow house he was renting in Arles languished for nearly 120 years in the French town of Ginoux. Van Gogh’s sketchbook and datebook were recovered by a neighbor, who didn’t realize what she had, but gave them to her daughter as a birthday

present. Dr. Felix Rey, of the Van Gogh portrait that was used to fix a hole in a chicken coop, gets partial credit—or blame—for the sketchbook’s disappearance. (The chicken coop story is in my December 2022 newsletter. Dr. Rey is also featured in my January 2023 newsletter. [Here is the link to my website where you can read previous newsletters.](#))

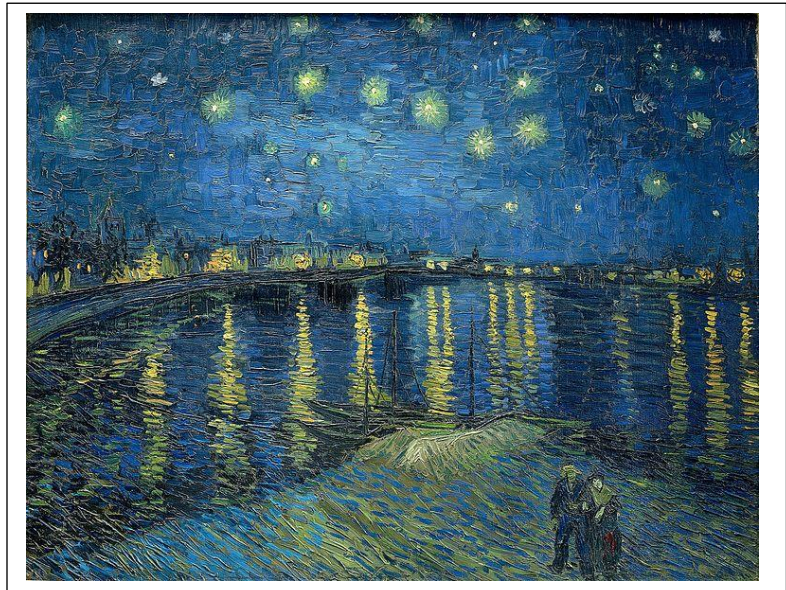
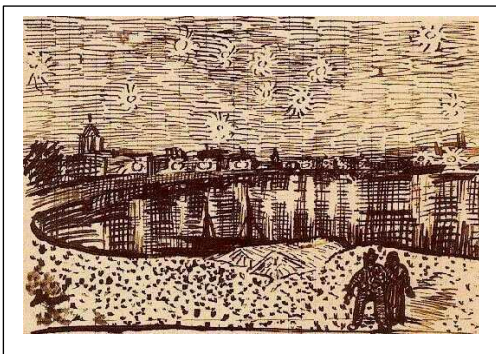
Van Gogh’s sketchbook took 120 years to surface and filled in some interesting blanks during the last two years of his life. Here is a sketch of the yellow house in Arles that he shared with Paul Gauguin prior to being placed in the asylum. (I’ll write more about Van Gogh’s tempestuous relationship with Paul Gauguin in the next newsletter.)



Here is the finished copy of “The Yellow House,” painted in September, 1888.



Here is the remaining painting in the Nocturne series, along with the preliminary sketch for comparison:



Van Gogh, Starry Night Over the Rhône, September 1888

Meanwhile, I'll be giving the following talks:

Saturday, April 29, 2:30 pm
I will be talking about "Let The Earth Breathe."
Boyle County Public Library
307 W. Broadway
Danville, KY 40422

Saturday, May 13, 11:00 am
Louisville "How-to Festival"

“Let The Earth Breathe”
Louisville Main Library
301 York Street
Louisville, KY 40203

Friday, June 9th, 3:00 pm
“Let The Earth Breathe”
LaRue County Library
215 Lincoln Dr.
Hodgenville, KY 42748

Thursday, July 20, 11:00 am
“Let The Earth Breathe”
Shelby County Public Library
309 8th St.
Shelbyville, KY 40065

[Here's the link to my website for the most up-to-date schedule of talks.](#)

For those of you who attended a recent talk, here are the links to the native plant groups and native plant nurseries:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/KYNativePlantsSwap>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/kentuckynativeplantsociety>

<https://www.dropseednursery.com/>

<https://roundstoneseed.com/>

<https://www.prairiemoon.com/>

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.](#) 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 that inspired "[A Promise Moon](#)" and how it relates to the Underground Railroad in Kentucky. I'm also available to talk about gardening with native plants and "[Let The Earth Breathe](#)." If you or anyone you know would like to schedule a talk, here's the [link](#).

Happy reading.

Stephen Allten Brown

www.singingrockpublishing.com