

Vincent Van Gogh: The Sunflower Series, part two, his later years



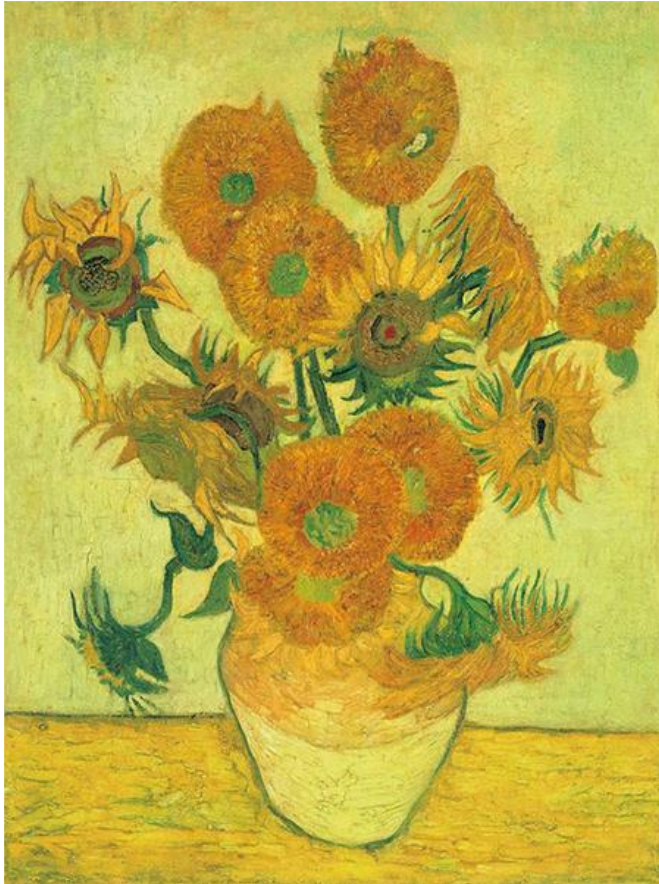
Hello:

I hope this finds you well and reading a good book.

Vincent Van Gogh created five large canvases featuring sunflowers in a vase. I discussed his early sunflower series in the previous newsletter. Van Gogh painting this later series in Arles, in the south of France, in 1888 and 1889. This was an experiment in using three shades of yellow, 'and nothing else.' He intended to demonstrate that an artist could create a compelling image using variations of a single color. Pictured below: "Sunflowers" at the National Gallery, London.



This next painting is also titled, “Sunflowers,” and is on display at the Sampo Museum of Art in Tokyo, Japan. The black and white picture to the right of the painting shows the canvas hanging in Paul von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy’s country home on the outskirts of Berlin. His heirs have filed a lawsuit claiming that it was a “forced sale” because he was Jewish and Paris was under Nazis occupation when the painting changed hands.



Van Gogh suffered from seizures which doctors, including Dr. Felix Rey and Dr. Peyron, believed to be caused by temporal lobe epilepsy. Van Gogh was born with a brain lesion that many doctors believe was aggravated by his prolonged use of absinthe, which also contributed to his epileptic condition. Dr. Gachet, another of Van Gogh's physicians, was thought to have treated his epilepsy with digitalis. This prescription drug can cause one to see in yellow or see yellow spots. This may have been one of the reasons why Van Gogh loved this color.

Another reason for Van Gogh’s fascination with yellow is because of a technological breakthrough that created chrome yellow pigments which were much brighter than previously available. Unfortunately, they are prone to fading and have given his once-bright canvases a muddy, brownish hue.



“Sunflowers” at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam

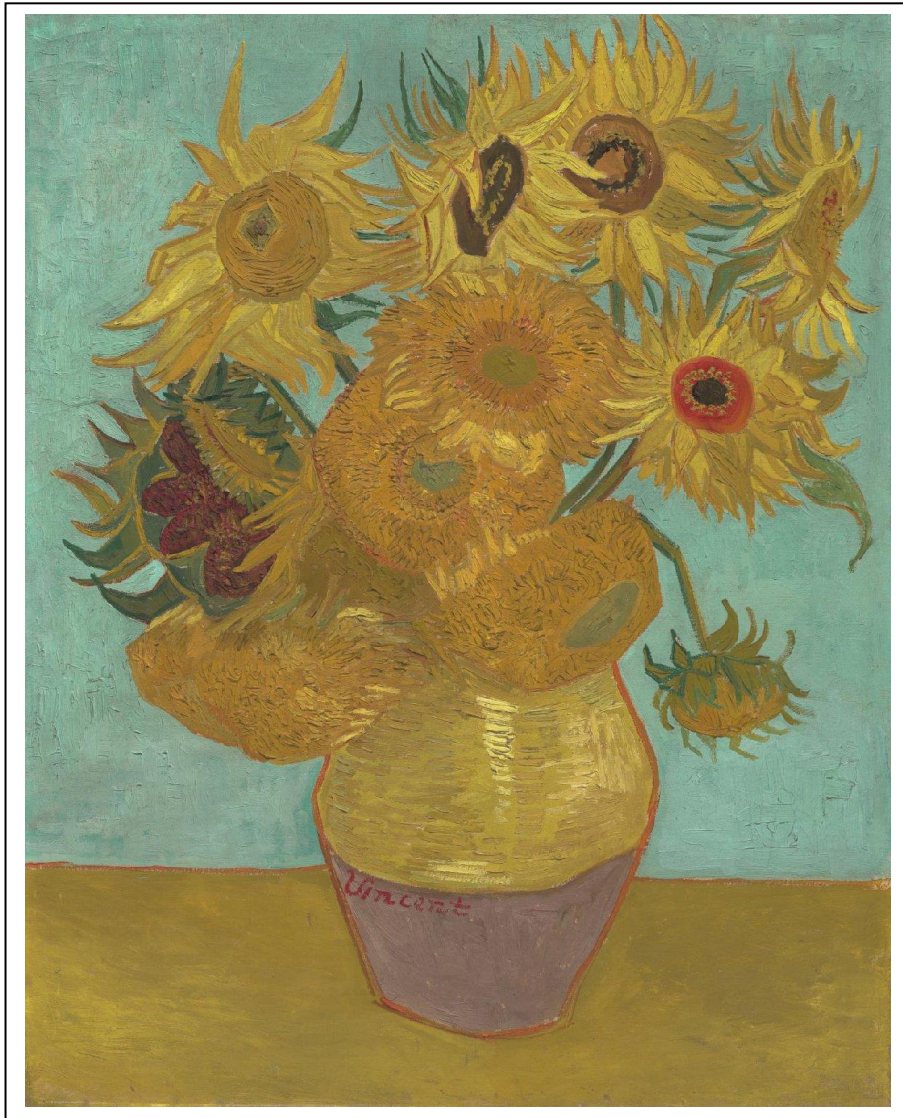
Extensive study at the Van Gogh Museum has discovered that the color changes are mostly due to a certain type of red paint (geranium lake) fading and a certain type of yellow paint (chrome yellow) darkening. Did you notice the faint discoloration at the top of the painting? Van Gogh added a strip of wood at the top of the painting when he ran out of room. (Close-up pictured below.)



The next canvas in the series is pictured below and on display at *Neue Pinakothek* Museum in Munich, Germany. Despite Hitler's desire to sell Modern (Degenerate) art in order to raise money for the Nazi regime, the museum's director risked his life by having the canvas removed from display and hidden in a storeroom instead of selling it. Threats of Allied bombing in 1939 created an opportunity to move the painting to the *Schloss Neuschwanstein*, where it remained hidden until the end of World War II. *Schloss Neuschwanstein* is widely believed to have been the inspiration for the castle in Disney's versions of "Cinderella," and "Sleeping Beauty."



The final canvas featured in this series is on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Van Gogh completed this “Sunflowers” painting from memory during the winter of 1889 while at the asylum in Saint-Rémy.



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. 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](#).

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

Happy reading.

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