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Art Appreciation lecture series 2025

Legendary Stories: Leonardo da Vinci to Murakami

The Starry Night, Vincent van Gogh

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Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889

Lecture summary

Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, is arguable one of modern culture's most iconic images. Painted during a period of personal difficulty for van Gogh, made a mere six weeks after he had voluntarily admitted himself as a patient at the Saint-Paul asylum in Saint-Rémy, the work is a window into the artist's view on landscape as symbolism, consolation and religion.

The work is uniquely van Gogh: it is layered with thick impasto paint, is energetic, brave and bold in its colouring, and is of nature, a vista of rural lands, the homes of the peasants which can go both admired and wanted to capture in his art. It is also conceptually complex and informed by van Gogh's many interests and personal experiences, aspects, which I intend to explore in the rest of this lecture, revealing how this triumph of a work is more than a composite of aesthetic vignettes.

Slide list

1. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.
2. Vincent van Gogh, *The Garden of the Asylum at Saint-Rémy*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 91.5 x 72cm.
3. Vincent van Gogh, *Iris*, 1889. Oil on thinned cardboard, mounted on canvas. 62.3 x 48.3cm.
Vincent van Gogh, *Irises*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 74.3 x 94.3cm.
4. Vincent van Gogh, *The Olives Trees*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 72.6 x 91.4cm.
5. Vincent van Gogh, *The Walled Cornfield with the rising*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73 x 92cm.

- Vincent van Gogh, *Mountain Landscape behind the Saint Paul Hospital*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 70 x 88cm.
7. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.
 8. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.
Vincent van Gogh, *Green Wheat Field with Cypress*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.5 x 92.5 cm
 9. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.
Vincent van Gogh, *Mountain Landscape behind the Saint Paul Hospital*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 70 x 88 cm
 10. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm
Vincent van Gogh, *View of Saint-Rémy*, 1889. Pencil on wove paper. 23.8 x 31.9 cm
 11. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.
 12. George Henry Boughton, *God speed! Pilgrims setting out for Canterbury*, 1874. Oil on canvas. 122.0 x 184.0 cm
 14. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.
 15. Jean-François Millet, *The Sower*, 1851. Lithograph. 19.4 x 13.3cm
Vincent van Gogh, *The Sower (after Millet)*, 1880. Pencil, pen and brush and ink, watercolour, on paper. 48.1 x 36.7cm.
Vincent van Gogh, *The Sower (after Millet)*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 80.8 x 66cm.
 16. Vincent van Gogh, *Sower with Setting Sun*, 1888. Oil on canvas. 64.0 x 80.5cm.
 17. Vincent van Gogh, *Sower with Setting Sun*, 1888. Oil on canvas. 64.0 x 80.5 cm.
Vincent van Gogh, *Sower with Setting Sun*, 1888. Oil on canvas. 32 x 40cm.
 18. Vincent van Gogh, *Wheatfield at Sunrise*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 71.0 x 90.5 cm.
 19. Vincent van Gogh, *The Peita (after Delacroix)*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.0 x 60cm.
 20. Vincent van Gogh, *The Raising of Lazarus (after Rembrandt)*, 1890. Oil on paper. 50 x 65.5cm.
Vincent van Gogh, *The good Samaritan (after Delacroix)*, 1890. Oil on canvas. 73 x 59.5cm.
 21. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.
 22. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night over the Rhone*, 1888. Oil on canvas. 73 x 92cm.
 23. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.
 24. Vincent van Gogh, *Peasant Churchyard*, 1885. Oil on canvas. 65 x 80cm.
 25. Vincent van Gogh, *The Church at Auvers*, 1890. Oil on canvas. 74 x 94cm.
 26. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889. Oil on canvas. 73.7 x 92.1cm.

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