

Art contextual analysis on “Starry Night”



The artist's life and training-

Vincent Van Gogh was born on March 30th, 1853 in the Netherlands. He was incredibly close with his brother, Theodore or Theo. Vincent was encouraged to draw by his mother when he was younger. Van Gogh's uncle got him a position with an art dealer and after completing his training he moved on to another branch in London. Later on in his life, Vincent went to Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts where he studied anatomy and modelling and perspective. Vincent continued to draw and eventually was introduced into painting and watercolor. He began painting and creating art that at the time wasn't in style. However, his paintings did get worldwide recognition, but unfortunately, this was at a time when Vincent had already passed away.

Patronage of the work-

This painting was actually made when Vincent was in an asylum. He painted the view from his window outside, and that is how "Starry Night" was created. Not much is known about the patronage of the work, since it was painted in an asylum, no one paid for this work to be done.

Political circumstances-

This was made in the year 1889. Van Gogh at the time was in an asylum due to cutting off his ear to stop hearing his hallucinations and words, as well as an epileptic problem that could've been caused by drinking too much and lack of food consumption. However, the doctors never made an official diagnosis as to why he was having epileptic problems. Also in 1889, he was in Saint Remy, which is a commune in France. France at this time was creating an international exposition to celebrate the French revolution. The Eiffel Tower was the main attraction. Art and creativity were definitely plentiful.

Religious circumstances-

Catholicism was and still is the main religion in France, and Vincent himself turned to religion after a bout of depression, and for a short period of time became a protestant missionary in southern Belgium. Religion does have a part in Vincent's art. When he was younger, he would paint lots of paintings and draw lots of churches. Religion seemed to have a great effect on his life, and some say he was searching for God in his paintings.

Philosophical movements of the time-

Henri Bergson's philosophy appealed a lot to not only the academic side, but also it appealed to the general public. Its first inception was in 1889, a year before Vincent's death. Bergson was known for his arguments that the process of immediate experience and intuition are more significant than science and abstract rationalism for understanding reality. He went on to win a Nobel Peace Prize in 1927 and continued to influence people until his death in 1941.

Other major forms of cultural expression in the time period-

In France in 1889, another artist named Edvard Munch (The Scream, Anxiety, The Dance of Life) opened up his one-man exhibit and won a scholarship to a school in Paris. There was also the exposition fair in Paris to celebrate the French revolution.

Contemporary, scientific and geographic knowledge-

In 1889, there was an influenza pandemic in Russia. French, British and German armies estimated case fatality rates. It took only four months for this pandemic to grow and sweep across the globe.

Original setting of work-

This is set in the outside of a window in Saint Paul's asylum in Saint Remy. It was Vincent's view of the outside world when he was in the hospital.

Original use of work-

The exact use isn't known, however Van Gogh was hospitalized while this was painted, so he most likely just painted it as an escape or for entertainment purposes.