

## Meet the Artist

Van Gogh vs. Vermeer



**ARTIST:** van GOGH, VINCENT (1853-1890)

**PRINT:** BEDROOM at ARIES

Post -Impressionism

Date: 1888

**Size:** 72.0 x 90.0 cm      **Medium:** Oil on Canvas

**ARTIST** Vincent van Gogh was Dutch by birth and the son of a Protestant pastor. He believed that he had a religious calling and for many years did missionary work in the slums and the mining districts of Belgium. He was sensitive and gentle by nature. He longed to be of humble service, but he failed in everything that he tried to do for these poor people. After repeated failures, he was exhausted and close to despair. Vincent van Gogh turned to art. He had a will to create and share. He was determined to give happiness by creating beauty.

Vincent van Gogh's life was full of heartbreak, loneliness and poverty. He sold almost none of his paintings and depended on his brother Theo completely for his support. Vincent van Gogh was known to have violent mood swings, thus making himself very unpopular and even mocked. It was in one of these violent moods that he cut off his own ear and sent it to an old girlfriend. For several years he was put in a mental institution where he continued painting. It wasn't until later in his life that it was discovered he suffered from epilepsy, which explained his moodiness. Vincent van Gogh died alone, when he was only 37 years old.

**PRINT** - The bright and bold use of color in Vincent's Bedroom in Arles is typical of the vibrant palette he began to use beginning late in his Paris period. Yellow was Van Gogh's favorite color throughout his Arles and Saint-Rémy period--whether outdoors in wheat fields under the Provencal sun or indoor works such as the bedroom.

Probably the most striking and unusual aspect of the painting is the peculiar perspective. The work is unrealistic in its warped portrayal of the bedroom, with the subjects skewed downward toward the viewer. This is one of the aspects that makes the painting so unique and easily recognizable. The perspective seems extreme, but later in his career as an artist Van Gogh was not only rebelling against the muted colors of the Dutch artists of the time, he was also breaking free from the confines of the perspective frame which dictated a precise and realistic approach to a work's perspective. Van Gogh often rejected conventional perspective in the latter half of his career as an artist--particularly in many of his Arles paintings.

Van Gogh's bedroom series of works is also unusual in that it's the only time that the artist depicts other examples of his own works within a painting.

**ARTIST: VERMEER, JOHANNES** (1632-1675)

**PRINT: The Milkmaid** Date: 1657-1658

**Size: 17 7/8 x 16 1/8 in. Medium: Oil on Canvas**

**ARTIST** - Johannes Vermeer was born in Delft, Holland where his father was an art dealer and innkeeper. An Italian painter, Caravaggio, who used light and shade in paintings, influenced him. When Vermeer was 21, he was received as a master painter in the guild of St. Luke. Vermeer and his fellow artists painted men, women and children engaged in household tasks or some little recreation. They reflect the values and activities of the simple domestic life style. Vermeer was married at the age of 20 and was the father of 8 children. He died at 43, leaving behind only 39 or 40 canvases that are known to be genuine Vermeers. These paintings represent Dutch genre (daily life) painting at its climax.

**PRINT** - The Milkmaid has several compositional features worth noting. Overall, there is a strong tactile quality to the picture — you can feel the dampness of the room, and almost touch the maid's sturdy, rounded shoulders. She is no delicate beauty, no idealized abstraction, but a real person who is totally focused on her domestic work.

Vermeer's palette features a toned down color scheme of white, yellow, and blue, consistent with the worn clothes of his subject, whose silhouette stands out against a bare white kitchen wall illuminated by light falling in from the window on the left. The vessels, the bread in the basket, and the pieces of bread on the table, are flecked with shimmering points of light exemplifying Vermeer's masterful pointillist painting technique. The paint itself is thick and granular, applied with heavy impasto.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

What is the same about these two paintings? What is different?

Can you find objects that are close and some that are far away in each picture?

Can you show me the movement in each picture?

Can you show me textures (rough or smooth) in each picture?

What time of day does each picture take place?

Which picture looks warm, which picture looks cool?

Where in the room is the artist sitting, while painting?

### **RELATED ACTIVITIES**

Make a list of things that are alike and different about the two pictures.

Use your list to write an explanation of why you like one better than the other.

Draw a picture of your favorite room in your home. Use details and colors to show how you feel in this room.

Draw a picture about people who work; mowing lawns, hanging laundry, washing cars, or another activity of your choice.

Sources: <http://www.getinvolvedineducation.com/pdfs/For-Program-Managers/Meet-the-Masters-Program-Manual.pdf>

<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/famous-paintings/milkmaid.htm>

[http://www.vggallery.com/painting/p\\_0482.htm](http://www.vggallery.com/painting/p_0482.htm)