Vincent van Gogh

- 1853-1890 (37)
- Zundert, the Netherlands
- Post-impressionism: His paintings and drawings include some of the world's best known, most popular and most expensive pieces.
The Netherlands

- The Netherlands is a parliamentary democratic constitutional monarchy, located in Western Europe. It is bordered by the North Sea to the north and west, Belgium to the south, and Germany to the east.

- The Netherlands is often called *Holland*. This is formally incorrect as North and South Holland in the western Netherlands are only two of the country’s twelve provinces. As a matter of fact, many Dutch people colloquially use *Holland* as a synecdoche, being well aware of the widespread use of this name.
Self portrait, 1887
Vase with 12 sunflowers, 1888
Cafe Terrace at Night, 1888
Wheat field with crows, 1890
Medical problems

• Van Gogh cut off the lobe of his left ear during some sort of seizure on 24 December 1888. Mental problems afflicted him, particularly in the last few years of his life. There has been much debate over the years as to the source of Van Gogh's mental illness and its effect on his work. Over 150 psychiatrists have attempted to label his illness, and some 30 different diagnoses have been suggested.
Medical problems

- Manic depressive disorder (MDP): ear episode, suicide
- Schizophrenia
- Epilepsy
- Infectious disease: syphilis
- Toxins: lead poisoning
- Acute intermittent prophyuria
Medical problems

• Van Gogh's depression deepened, and on 27 July 1890, at the age of 37, he walked into the fields and shot himself in the chest with a revolver. Without realizing that he was fatally wounded he returned to the Ravoux Inn where he died in his bed two days later. Theo hastened to be at his side and reported his last words as "La tristesse durera toujours" (French for "the sadness will last forever")
Ocular problems

- Eyesight: limited record, no glasses for reading or distance
- Halos: colored halos in Starry night, Night café
- Yellow vision (xanthopsia): Night café, self portrait
Starry night, 1889
The night café, 1888
Self-portrait, 1888
Halos

- Glaucoma
- Caused by diffraction of light, breaking up of white light into its component parts, the color spectrum.
- In his letters there is no mention of the characteristic symptoms: eye pain, nausea, sudden loss of vision
Yellow vision

- Digitalis: Dr Paul Gachet has been accused of giving excessive dose of digitalis
Portrait of Dr Gachet, 1890 ($82.5 million)
Digitalis

- It is used to increase cardiac contractility and as an antiarrhythmic agent to control the heart rate, particularly in the irregular (and often fast) atrial fibrillation. It is therefore often prescribed for patients in atrial fibrillation, especially if they have been diagnosed with heart failure.
Toxicity

- nausea, vomiting, anorexia, diarrhea, abdominal pain, wild hallucinations, delirium, and severe headache, tremors, various cerebral disturbances, especially of a visual nature (unusual color visions with objects appearing yellowish to green, and blue halos around lights), convulsions, heart block, bradycardia, and tachycardia
Nonmedical factors

• He has an intellectual fascination with color throughout his career
• He also experimented liberally with color harmonies and impressionistic effects of colors
• The Raising of Lazarus, Night cafe
The raising of Lazarus, 1890
The raising of Lazarus, 1890

• At first glance, a good demonstration of xanthopsia

• Letter to Theo: the cave and corpse are white-yellow-violet, the woman has a green dress and orange hair, in the background a country-side of blue hills, a yellow sunrise. Although the quality of color is not everything in a picture, it is what gives it life
Night café, 1888

- Letter to Theo: the room is blood red and dark yellow with a green billiard table, four citron-yellow lamps with the glow of orange and green
- This painting is rather a thoughtful study of the effect of artificial lighting rater than impulsive recollection of a yellow scene
The night café, 1888
Paul Gauguin’s comment

• Oh yes, he loved yellow, this good Vincent, this painter from Holland, those glimmers of sunlight rekindled his soul, that abhorred the fog, that needed the warmth