



THE REAL VAN GOGH THE ARTIST AND HIS LETTERS

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Press Release

THE REAL VAN GOGH: THE ARTIST AND HIS LETTERS

MAIN GALLERIES

23 January – 18 April 2010

The Royal Academy of Arts presents a landmark exhibition of the work of Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890). The exhibition focuses on the artist's remarkable correspondence. Over 35 original letters, rarely exhibited to the public due to their fragility, are on display in the main galleries of Burlington House, together with around 65 paintings and 30 drawings that express the principal themes to be found within the correspondence. Thus the exhibition offers a unique opportunity to gain an insight into the complex mind of Vincent van Gogh. This is the first major Van Gogh exhibition in London for over forty years.

In addition to lending almost all the letters in the exhibition, the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, has made available twelve important paintings. Other major lenders include the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, together with other museums and private collections worldwide.

Born in Groot-Zundert in the southern Netherlands in 1853, Van Gogh was the eldest of six children of a Protestant pastor. In his early adult life, he worked for a firm of art-dealers in The Hague and London, before becoming a missionary worker. His career as an artist began only in 1880, when he was 27. During his ten-year artistic career, which his suicide cut tragically short in 1890, Van Gogh's output was prodigious: largely self-taught, he produced over 800 paintings and 1,200 drawings.

Van Gogh was a compulsive and eloquent correspondent. The majority of his letters were written to his brother Theo, an art-dealer who supported Vincent throughout his difficult artistic career. Vincent also wrote to other family members, including his sister Willemien. Other artists, notably Anton van Rappard, Emile Bernard and Paul Gauguin, were also, at different phases of Vincent's life, recipients of his letters. The originality of his ideas about art, nature and literature, combined with his deep understanding of these

subjects, make Van Gogh's letters much more than a personal expression of feelings: they attain the status of great literature. In reading the letters one encounters not only a sensitive, determined and exceptionally hard-working man, but also someone possessed of a powerful intellect; this exhibition challenges the view that Van Gogh was an erratic genius by allowing the viewer a rare insight into his artistic process through the intimate medium of his correspondence. Together the letters create a 'self-portrait', and reveal the ways in which Van Gogh defined himself as an artist and as a human being.

Taking the letters as its starting point, **The Real Van Gogh: The Artist and His Letters** views the paintings and drawings from the perspective of the correspondence. The letter sketches that Van Gogh frequently used to show a work in progress or a completed work are a fascinating part of the correspondence, and many are shown alongside the paintings or drawings on which they are based.

Highlights of the exhibition include *Self-portrait as an Artist* (1888) and *The Yellow House* (1888) from the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam; *Still-life: with a Plate of Onions* (1889) from the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo; *Van Gogh's Chair* (1888) from the National Gallery, London; and *Entrance to the Public Gardens in Arles* (1888) from the Phillips Collection, Washington DC.

Examining such themes as the role of colour in painting, the cycles of nature, friendship, religion and literature, the exhibition celebrates the new edition of the artist's correspondence **Vincent van Gogh – The Letters: The Complete Illustrated and Annotated Edition**, published by Thames & Hudson in October 2009. The result of fifteen years of scholarship by Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker of the Van Gogh Museum, the complete correspondence of Vincent van Gogh is published as a printed edition in three languages and as an integral web-edition, thereby providing the worldwide public with a wealth of new information. The exhibition is based on many insights that the new and extensive research into the letters has produced.

ORGANISATION

The Real Van Gogh: The Artist and His Letters has been curated by Ann Dumas of the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in collaboration with Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker of the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

SPONSOR STATEMENT

'Our support of the arts as part of our wider philanthropic endeavours has been a constant throughout BNY Mellon's 225-year history,' says Helena Morrissey, Director at BNY Mellon and a member of the Corporate Board of the Royal Academy, 'but it is nonetheless a rare and very special privilege to be able to support the Royal Academy in bringing to the public such a historic work of scholarship, one that illuminates anew Van Gogh's life and art.'

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CATALOGUE

The Royal Academy's accompanying exhibition catalogue explores the principal themes of the exhibition in essays by Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker, the leading authorities on the artist's correspondence, with Ann Dumas. Scholarly catalogue entries are written by the Van Gogh specialists Teio Meedendorp, Aukje Vergeest and Roelie Zwikker.

Illustrated with works of art and letters that demonstrate Van Gogh's abiding preoccupations, this fascinating catalogue explores the correspondence as a self-portrait of the artist and the man. The letter-sketches that he used to describe completed works or those in progress are reproduced alongside the paintings or drawings on which they are based, providing a unique insight into his artistic development. Drawing on extensive new research, leading authorities on Van Gogh reveal how the letters enhance and shape our view of this modern master.

DATES

Open to public: Saturday 23 January – Sunday 18 April 2010
10 am – 6 pm daily (last admission 5.30 pm)
Fridays until 10 pm (last admission 9.30 pm)
Saturdays until 9 pm (last admission 8.30 pm)

ADMISSION

£12 full price; £10 Registered Disabled and 60 + years; £8 NUS / ISIC cardholders; £4 12–18 years and Income Support; £3 8–11 years; 7 and under free

TICKETS

Tickets are available daily at the RA. To book tickets in advance please telephone 0844 209 1919 or visit www.royalacademy.org.uk. Groups of ten or more are asked to book in advance; please telephone 020 7300 8027, fax 020 7300 8084 or email groupbookings@royalacademy.org.uk

IMAGES

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To book tickets in advance please print www.royalacademy.org.uk or 0844 209 1919

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