Vincent van Gogh (pronounced Vincent vun-KHOKH) (1853–1890)

Dutch Post-impressionist painter. Considered one of the greatest Dutch painters, although he remained poor and virtually unknown throughout his life.

Van Gogh Lessons

Lesson 1: Complementary Colors
(acrylic paint / art journal)

Lets use color to add intensity into our art! But first, let me give you a little background about how van Gogh used his mastery of complementary colors to add energy into his artwork.

Complementary colors are two colors that appear opposite of each other on the color wheel.

- Blue and orange
- Yellow and purple
- Red and green

The effect of this interaction of colors is called simultaneous contrast. Simultaneous contrast is most intense when two complementary colors are directly next to each other.

- Van Gogh’s painting technique

*Café Terrace on the Place du Forum*, 1888
The orange and blue accentuate each other in Van Gogh’s Café Terrace on the Place du Forum, above.

Van Gogh uses the power of complementary colors to heighten the visual effect = simultaneous contrast.

He wanted to move our eyes around the painting, not just by the composition, but by his use of complementary color:

*The rear windows* – have a very strong saturated orange sitting right next to a pure ultramarine blue, this causes the shimmering effect to give the evening window light a ‘glow’.

*The front of the cobbles* – He uses color in a more subtle way. Look at the small arches of orange and blue, they add movement.

*Warm and cool colors* – add visual depth to a painting because cool colors recede into the background and warm colors come forward.

*The Night Café*, 1888

**Assignment** : Make your painting as simple or as complex as you like using any 2 complementary colors. If you are feeling frisky do the same thing for all 3 complementary color ways!
Lesson 2: Self-Portrait
(acrylic paint / art journal)

As a self-taught artist, van Gogh practiced his technique and craft by painting self-portraits. Dozens of them!! Some of you may already be familiar with painting faces and for some of you this will be the first time and that is awesome! Start where you are! These lessons are not about mastery, they are about broadening your own personal horizons and applying techniques used by the artists that came before us.

And I am going to tell you a secret...this is only the second face I have ever painted in acrylic since I started my practice of painting faces. I have only painted faces in oil. I tell you this so you know I was a little scared too 😊.

- Step 1: Take a selfie!
- Step 2: Freak out!
- Step 3: watch the video lesson
- Step 4: Freak out some more!
- Step 5: You can do it, it is just paint and know I am behind you cheering you on all the way!

Bonus Lesson:
Feeling like stretching yourself further, try interpreting what you love about van Gogh into a style all your own! Sometimes when we are first learning or in the earlier stages of our own growth we forget that the practices we do today will shape and make us a better artists down the road. No matter where you are in your own personal art journey, practice is important! I share these next examples with you because I want to share with you how the influences of master artists like van Gogh influence the current art of artists today and how I take what I see and learn and incorporate it into what I do.

- Skewing the Masters one of the ways we can learn from the artists we revere is to take the characteristics we love about an artwork and apply them in a way to a style or theme all your own. Recently, I participated in a gallery exhibit where I got a chance to do just that.
• Use these examples as guides by skewing one of your own favorite van Gogh pieces into an expressive piece of art that blends a little bit of you with van Gogh!

**Example 1:**

Incorporating the color and dramatic lines from van Gogh’s original *Self-Portrait*, I was able to marry a bit of van Gogh and a bit of Donna Downey onto the canvas to create a floral in my signature style.

**Example 2:**

Using movement, color and composition of van Gogh’s *The Starry Night* to inspire the arrangement of elements as a floral.

**Example 3:**
Again working from the color palette and brushwork in van Gogh’s *Auvers After the Rain*, I was able to morph his painting and my style together to create something more originally me!