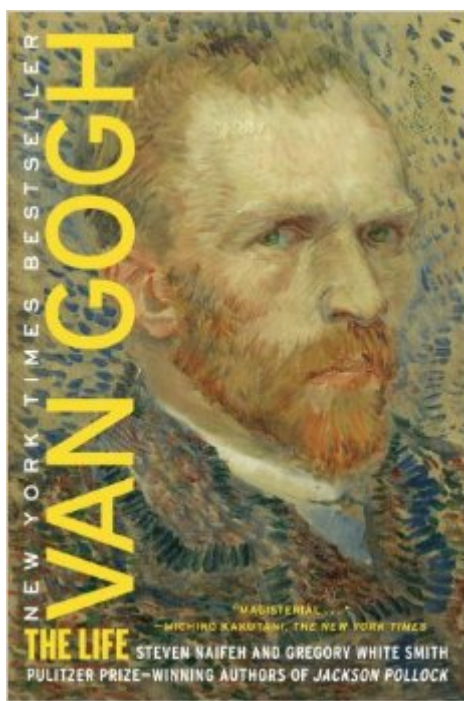


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# Van Gogh: The Life



## Synopsis

Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, who galvanized readers with their Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Jackson Pollock, have written another tour de force—an exquisitely detailed, compellingly readable portrait of Vincent van Gogh. Working with the full cooperation of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, Naifeh and Smith have accessed a wealth of previously untapped materials to bring a crucial understanding to the larger-than-life mythology of this great artist: his early struggles to find his place in the world; his intense relationship with his brother Theo; and his move to Provence, where he painted some of the best-loved works in Western art. The authors also shed new light on many unexplored aspects of Van Gogh's inner world: his erratic and tumultuous romantic life; his bouts of depression and mental illness; and the cloudy circumstances surrounding his death at the age of thirty-seven. Although countless books have been written about Van Gogh, no serious, ambitious examination of his life has been attempted in more than seventy years. Naifeh and Smith have re-created Van Gogh's life with an astounding vividness and psychological acuity that bring a completely new and sympathetic understanding to this unique artistic genius.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

Praise for *Van Gogh: The Life*

“Magisterial.” —Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

“This generation's definitive portrait of the great Dutch post-Impressionist.” —*Time*

“A tour de force . . . an enormous achievement . . . Reading his life story is like riding an endless roller coaster of delusional highs and lows. . . . [A] sweepingly authoritative, astonishingly textured book.” —*Los Angeles Times*

“Marvelous . . . [Van Gogh] reads like a novel, full of suspense and intimate detail. . . . In beautiful prose, Naifeh and Smith argue convincingly for a subtler, more realistic evaluation of Van Gogh, and we all win.” —*The Washington Post*

“Brilliant . . . At once a model of scholarship and an emotive, pacy chunk of hagiography.” —*The Daily Telegraph (London)*

A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK

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## Customer Reviews

As an art history professor and author of a book on Van Gogh, I have spent many years researching the life, motives and actions of Vincent Van Gogh. I am convinced that he was a heroic man. He was a consistent champion of the underdog, and on numerous occasions took blame for the misdeeds of others. The idea that Vincent wanted to protect the boys who accidentally shot him is consistent with his personality. Emotionally and intuitively, Vincent's accidental shooting and his protection of the young boys makes perfect sense, and offers a far more reasonable conclusion to an extraordinary life--one that was from beginning to end selflessly devoted to the Gospel theme of loving another in place of oneself. To Vincent Van Gogh, it was about cherishing daily life in pursuit of eternal salvation, though his path to redemption was uneven and even at times tortured. And perhaps--as Naifeh and Smith have suggested in their book--this act of compassion in shielding those young boys from blame, and in preventing his brother Theo from further undue stress, may well have been a coup de grÃ¢ce...a final effort to propel himself into the eternal life to which he had long aspired. In my view, *Van Gogh: The Life* is a book any serious Van Gogh fan should own for the impressive amount of information that Naifeh and Smith present. For instance, the authors offer the reader a portrait of conventional Dutch social life in the nineteenth century and the complex and conflicted role Vincent played within that era. Other notable features of the book include an astute discussion of the importance of music in Van Gogh's aesthetic formation. Passages of the book are simply beautiful and noteworthy.

My wife and I went to the Van Gogh Museum soon after it opened in 1973. It is still perhaps the most interesting museum we have ever visited. That's because it had--what is today called--a "back story." You can view his paintings in chronological order, against the backdrop of what most would admit is the folklore of Van Gogh. Based on a decade of research and collaboration with the museum, this book fact-checks and synthesizes those stories into a compelling analysis of how Van Gogh 1) failed in every career endeavor, 2) painfully and begrudgingly gained the respect of other

Impressionist painters while selling only one painting, 3) could create masterpieces in hours, and 4) left a decade's worth of work that soon became wildly popular and priceless. The other comments focus on the circumstances of his death. True, there is little in the book about that, but really his whole life reflected his inability to get along with local townspeople and how gangs of boys tormented the hobo in their midst. The book is absolutely a psychological study of Van Gogh's fears, motivations, hopes and dreams, but the authors also do a wonderful job of showing how all that lead to bizarre behaviors that turned so many against him. One wonders whether he would have discovered a new kind of art without the mental and physical mockery swirling all around him. This collaboration also suggests the direction that art, history, libraries and museums may be heading in the future. The Van Gogh Museum is now promoting Vincent and Theo's letters on their website so anyone can interpret them and decide for themselves what may have driven such an original artist.

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