

Painted with Words: Vincent van Gogh's Letters to Émile Bernard
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Artists' Biographies

Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Dutch

Although his career as an artist lasted only ten years, van Gogh produced more than 860 paintings and about 1,200 watercolors and drawings. He also wrote more than 800 letters, the majority to his brother Theo. Both his works and his letters contributed to his legacy as a psychologically tortured, struggling artist who ranks among the most important and influential modern painters.

Van Gogh produced some of his most celebrated works during the last two and a half years of his life, while in the south of France, first at Arles (February 1888–April 1889), then Saint-Rémy (May 1889–May 1890), and finally Auvers (June–July 1890). The letters, drawings, and paintings from this period document his artistic maturity and the application of his ideas about painting.

Émile Bernard (1868–1941), French

Rebelling against his father's wishes, Bernard chose to become an artist when he was sixteen years old. Two years later he met van Gogh in Paris and began a friendship significant for both artists. Bernard had a lengthy career, but his best work is confined to the late 1880s, when he worked in Paris and Brittany. In Brittany, along with Gauguin, Bernard developed the cloissonist style, with its heavy contours and flat areas of color. Bernard's work as an art critic and catalyst was equally important. He published the letters van Gogh sent to him shortly after the artist's death and organized one of the first French retrospectives of van Gogh's work in 1892. In addition he corresponded with Gauguin, Cézanne, Odilon Redon among others, and was the author of several important articles on contemporary art.