

# The journey of the painter Vincent van Gogh



# The journey of the painter Vincent van Gogh

Ruud Hobo

A story about Vincent van Gogh,  
about his life as a painter during his stay in

Nuenen,  
Antwerp,  
Paris,  
Arles,  
Saint-Rémy-de-Provence  
and  
Auvers-sur-Oise

told by Vincent himself.

*Due to high licensing costs, I unfortunately cannot show Vincent's paintings in this book. In the text, I'll link [XX00] to a chapter at the back of the book. There you'll find more information about the work by Vincent and other painters mentioned.  
Vincent's works can be found at <http://www.vggallery.com>  
The pictures in this book are made by me.*

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# 1 Introduction

"The journey of the painter Vincent van Gogh" is the sequel to the book "Vincent in Drenthe". In that book, you can read about Vincent's experiences during his three-month stay in Drenthe, a province in the eastern Netherlands, in the autumn of 1883. His highs and lows, but especially the conclusion that Vincent himself drew about that stay. In Drenthe, Vincent discovered what the purpose of his life, his destiny is: To be a skilled and successful painter and no longer be dependent on Theo's financial support. His departure from Drenthe marks the beginning of his journey towards that goal. This journey takes him through:

Nuenen	05-12-1883 - 24-11-1885
Antwerpen	24-11-1885 - 28-02-1886
Paris	28-02-1886 - 19-02-1888
Arles	20-02-1888 - 08-05-1889
Saint-Rémy de Provence	08-05-1889 - 16-05-1890
Paris	16-05-1890 - 20-05-1890
to	
Auvers-sur-Oise	20-05-1890 - 29-07-1890

In that place, we meet Vincent, and he shares his experiences during that long journey.

We don't know exactly what he experienced in those places. The approximately five hundred letters Vincent wrote from his departure from Drenthe until his stay in Auvers-sur-Oise give only a limited picture. Unfortunately, the letters Vincent received from Theo, his parents, and fellow painters are mostly lost, except for a few. From Vincent's responses in his letters, we can deduce some things. The encounters and conversations he had are events I have filled in myself. The story is therefore a mix of fiction and non-fiction. The meeting Vincent has with Alex de Goede is completely fictional. However, Vincent writes in his letter of June 17, 1890: *"It was a pleasure to meet the Dutchman who came yesterday."* ...

The two books I have written about Vincent are different from almost all other books about Vincent van Gogh. In those books, it is indeed about Vincent. In my books, I let Vincent speak for himself.

There are two important themes in Vincent's life. These two aspects play a significant role in his life and therefore in this story:

- Vincent often suffers from bouts of depression. Back then, this was called melancholy. The only effective way for Vincent to suppress the melancholy was by painting a lot and seeking distractions.
- Since his dismissal from Goupil on April 1, 1876, Vincent has never earned money himself. Therefore, he has always been dependent on what Theo and sometimes his father gave him. As a result, he was always short of money. This prevented him from always being able to paint and draw, causing the melancholy to resurface.

The story begins in July 1890 with an unexpected encounter in Auvers-sur-Oise, the place that turns out to be the last stop on Vincent's journey.

The chapter title indicates who the narrator is.

Enjoy reading!

Ruud Hobo - Drenthe 2023/2024

## **2 Alex - Auvers-sur-Oise - Thursday July 10, 1890 - Afternoon**

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Alex de Goede. I am 48 years old. I am a traveling salesman by profession. I trade in anything that can make me a profit. This can include trading in wood, peat, tobacco, coal, etc. An emerging market of interest in the Netherlands is the wine trade. Although wine consumption in the Netherlands has declined significantly in recent decades, the signs are promising. The market is beginning to pick up again, and I see opportunities for myself. Last year, I went to Paris and made good contacts with French wine merchants at the World Expo. This past week in Paris, I have devoted a lot of time to that again.

Without bragging too much, I can say that I am quite good at my job. I know where there is demand, and I have a good insight into where demand for certain goods will arise. I capitalize on that. For instance, I have made quite a profit in the peat trade in the Netherlands. Because things are going so well financially, I no longer need to work six days a week from early morning until late at night, as I did at the beginning of my career. This gives me time for other things. I am interested in art, particularly painting. Not to trade or hang at home, but out of pure interest. In my humble opinion, paintings belong in a museum so that everyone who wants to, can see them. I am also interested in the story behind a painting or the life of the painter. I enjoy visiting museums both domestically and internationally. As a traveling salesman, I visit many places, and if there is a museum there, I can nicely combine my business stay in that city with a visit to the museum. With an ever-expanding railway network, many places are easier to reach and much faster and more comfortable than by horse and carriage as in my early years as a traveling salesman.

After the business part of my stay in Paris, I enjoyed the cultural life there for a few days. I attended a few theatre performances and various exhibitions of the well-known French masters. Unfortunately, there has been little new to see from those painters lately.

I found the works of the so-called Impressionists more interesting. I have a feeling that this movement or school could become very big in a few years. Maybe I should buy some of those works as an investment. I should think about it. Since I was in Paris anyway, I did some research. I



visited a rather large showroom of Boussod, Valadon & Cie on Boulevard Montmartre. This showroom is said to be managed by a Dutchman. Unfortunately, the man was not there. I did not get his name either.

In Paris, the first preparations for Quatorze Juillet, the national holiday next Monday, have started this morning. This holiday is still quite new. It was declared a national holiday only in 1880. That is just ten years ago. I don't feel like dealing with the crowd, so this morning I took a carriage from my hotel in Paris to Gare du Nord station. I am going to enjoy the beautiful French landscape and surrounding nature for a few days. Since I am not expected back in the Netherlands until Tuesday, I have plenty of time for that. On the advice of some painters, I spoke to at an exhibition in the Salon, I took the train to Auvers-sur-Oise. That is a village north of Paris. In that village, near the station opposite the town hall, there is an inn where you can also eat well, I was told. Therefore, I have telegraphically reserved a room.

It was a beautiful journey through a hilly area. I arrived at the Auvers-sur-Oise station early in the afternoon. After a short walk, I found the inn, Ravoux Inn, indeed opposite Place de la Mairie. The inn is centrally located on the main road to Pontoise. Auvers-sur-Oise is a popular destination for artists. Various painters, such as Daubigny, Cézanne, Pissarro, Daumier, and Corot, visited the village or had a studio there. My room, number two, is on the first floor. If you were to stand in front of the inn, you would see two windows on the first floor. The right one is my room. From the room, I have a beautiful view of the town hall.

Adeline, the daughter of the innkeeper Ravoux, told me that room five on the second floor is also occupied by a Dutchman. He is a painter who has been staying there for about eight weeks. This man is always out all morning and usually returns for lunch. After lunch, he goes to the painting room to work on his paintings. Today, he has not yet returned. I listen to her but pay little attention because I have already spoken to enough painters in the past few days. However, Adeline suggests that I could have dinner with this painter in the evening. She has the impression that he is a bit lonely. He has little contact with other guests. Moreover, it seems that he is regularly bullied by boys in the village. This painter only has contact with Doctor Gachet who lives further down. Maybe he only goes there for Marguerite, the doctor's daughter. It

doesn't escape me that she sounds a bit jealous. "But he has already made a few beautiful paintings of me," she adds.



Photo 1 Auberge Ravoux

After bringing my luggage to the room and having lunch, I went for a walk through the beautiful nature around Auvers. If you walk down the main road to the east, you can turn left opposite the bridge over the Oise. You will then pass a beautiful church. A large building with a lovely architectural style. Something to paint, in my opinion. Through the hills, I ended up at another small station in Chaponval. From there, you walk in almost a straight line back to the inn. Upon returning, I freshened up a bit in my room.

Now I am sitting on the small terrace in front of the inn. Adeline and her little sister Germaine are also here. They tell me that they have only had this inn for a year. The owner, mister Levert, rents this property to them, and artists regularly stay here. Just like that Dutchman she told me about. Once or twice a week, Nicolás Martínez Valdivieso comes by to dine with the painter. He is a Spanish artist who lives nearby. Not this week, as he is visiting family in Spain. Adeline has the impression that this Spaniard does not want to deal with the crowds around the national

holiday on the fourteenth of July. Enjoying a delicious French wine and some local delicacies, I stay here for a while longer.



Photo 2 The church tower just above the hill

In the distance, I see a man with painting supplies coming out of a side street. I get a sense of *déjà vu* immediately. That man looks familiar to me. When he walks past my table to enter the inn, I recognize him. "Sir, are you Vincent van Gogh, the painter?" I call out. He stops abruptly and looks at me with a 'where do I know you from' expression. "I am Alex de Goede. We met about six years ago in Nuenen. You told me about your stay in Drenthe," I continue. A big smile quickly appears on his face. "I recognize you. You are indeed the man who sought me out in Nuenen to listen to my story. How nice to see you again. I'll take my things upstairs and come right back." When he returns, he still has a big grin on his face. Adeline has set down a new carafe of delicious wine, water, and some treats.

"Just put it on my account," I tell her.

"Do you know each other?" she asks.

"Knowing is a big word," I reply, "but we have spoken before. I really didn't know he was here too. That is a big surprise for me."

When Adeline leaves us alone, I ask Vincent, "Do you drink water? No more wine?"

"For over a year now, I haven't had a drop of alcohol, and I feel very good about it. But now you surely want to know how I've fared after the Drenthe adventure and after we spoke in Nuenen."

"Of course, I have all the time. I'm not heading back to the Netherlands until Sunday or Monday. But tell me, did you come here from Nuenen? You mentioned possibly going to Antwerp back then."

"After nearly two years in Nuenen, I did indeed go to Antwerp. I took some drawing and painting lessons there. That was unsuccessful. A waste of my time. Then I went on to Paris. I lived with my brother Theo for two years. After those two years, I was more than fed up with the busy city. I dreamed of starting an artists' colony in the south, in Arles, with my painter friend Paul Gauguin. That also was unsuccessful. I had a mental breakdown and spent a year in a sort of psychiatric hospital in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, a village near Arles. Last May, after about a year in that hospital, I felt I was sufficiently recovered. I went to Paris, where I met Jo, Theo's wife, for the first time. And of course, I saw their little son, my nephew, for the first time. They named that boy Vincent, after his great uncle. I am very proud of that. Since mid-May, I've been here. I am enjoying myself, painting a lot, and I am thinking about going back to the Netherlands soon to visit my mother. But that will come. Let me start where we left off last time."

# NUENEN

### **3 Vincent – Nuenen - December 5, 1883 – December 1, 1884**

As I told you back then in Nuenen, Alex, I went from Drenthe to my parents in Nuenen at the beginning of December 1883. I left the inn in Nieuw-Amsterdam, unfortunately leaving behind some drawings and paintings that were not yet finished. I assumed they would keep them for me, as I would return soon. In any case, early in the spring. I can still remember that journey well. My trip to Nuenen began with a walk of more than six hours through the heath and along the canal to Hogeveen. It was a stormy morning with a lot of rain and snow. This walk calmed me. In Hogeveen, I picked up my things from Albertus Hartsuiker. Then I travelled by train to Eindhoven, and from there walked the last stretch to Nuenen. I was very apprehensive about living with my parents again. And they were also apprehensive about my arrival. They were not happy about it. It was anything but a warm reunion. What quickly disappointed me was that my father's opinion of me and his attitude towards me had not changed at all. It clashed again as it always had. You must realize that two years earlier I was kicked out of the house. From Drenthe, I wrote to my parents several times that I might come back for a short period. I hoped that then the differences of opinion could be set aside. At least from my side. But my father couldn't do that. He remained harsh in his judgment of me.

In the parsonage in Nuenen, my sister Willemien and brother Cor also lived there, making the house quite crowded. I was given the barn, a space behind the parsonage, to live and work in. This meant I didn't have to be in the house often. My father had forbidden me from entering the house. I got the impression he saw me as a sort of shepherd dog that comes into the room with muddy paws, dirtying everything. I still find myself getting angry about that. That's not good, especially since I soon noticed that my father couldn't understand me when I tried to explain something to him. It's now over six and a half years ago, so I need to let it rest. To my relief, both Theo and my friend Anthon van Rappard supported my decision to return to my parents.

Soon after, I went back to The Hague. Meanwhile, the space in the barn at the parsonage was being cleared out. I could set it up as my studio upon my return from The Hague. I still had some things in storage in The Hague, including studies, prints, and other items. I packed those

and sent them to Nuenen. I also spent a day with Van Rappard to admire the paintings he had made on Terschelling. I really liked them. In The Hague, I also visited Sien. That was difficult, as I still had strong feelings for her. It had only been about three months since I left her. I knew that living together was no longer an option. Starting over was not an option. Yet it continued to gnaw at me. I still thought about her regularly. I wrote about it to Theo several times, probably to try to let go of it. But I stuck to the decision not to continue living with her. By Christmas that year, I was back in Nuenen.



Photo 3 Parsonage in Nuenen

*"Vincent, first you were sent away from The Hague, away from Sien. Things didn't go as you hoped in Drenthe, and the reception from your parents was not very warm either. This period must have been very tough for you, right?"*

*"That's correct, Alex. It was indeed all quite unpleasant. I had the greatest difficulty suppressing an attack of melancholy. That was one of the reasons I went to The Hague quite quickly. I needed to get away from Nuenen for a bit to think about how to deal with it. You can imagine that after such a reception from your own parents. I resolved that once I was living in Nuenen, I would regularly look for opportunities to rent a studio elsewhere in the village where I might also live. No, it was not a warm return. The people in the village were very surprised that another Van Gogh existed. Apparently, they had never heard of my existence. But that's all in the past. Let's put it behind us.*