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VINCENT VAN GOGH: PAINTING WHAT WORDS COULD NEVER EXPLAIN

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Abstract: *This article looks at how visual art can express emotions and experiences that words cannot always capture, focusing on the paintings of the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh. It examines how Van Gogh turned his personal feelings and his view of the world into a distinctive visual language through color, composition, and expressive brushstrokes. Particular attention is given to two of his best-known works, The Starry Night (1889) and Wheatfield with Crows (1890). Analysis of these paintings shows how visual elements can express deep human emotions, including loneliness, uncertainty, hope, and inner conflict. The article argues that art is not only a representation of reality but also a powerful way of communicating emotion, one that connects people across generations.*

Keywords: *Vincent van Gogh, visual art, emotional expression, artistic communication, The Starry Night, Wheatfield with Crows, symbolism, color*

INTRODUCTION

Most people have, at some point, felt something they could not put into words. Such feelings seem to come from somewhere between the heart and the mind, and ordinary language is often too limited to hold them. In these moments, art can become another way of communicating, turning thoughts and feelings that remain unspoken into images. A person can look at a painting for hours and, in doing so, return to their innermost feelings, whether joyful or sad. Some may see this as a waste of time, even as foolishness, but they overlook the fact that art is not only something to be looked at; it is also something to be experienced. It allows us to explore emotions that we find hard to express.

An artist turns emotions into paintings and so builds a visual language that speaks beyond words. One artist who stands for this idea especially well is Vincent Willem van Gogh. His paintings do not simply show the world as it looks; they help us understand how the world might feel. Through color, shape, and brushwork, he created images that continue to speak to people across generations. This article looks at how that happens in two of his best-known works, *The Starry Night* and *Wheatfield with Crows*.

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METHODOLOGY

This article uses a visual analysis of two paintings by Van Gogh: *The Starry Night* (1889) and *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890). Each work is examined through its color, composition, and brushwork, to see how these elements express emotions such as loneliness, uncertainty, hope, and inner conflict. The two paintings were chosen because they are among his most recognized works. The interpretations offered here are possible readings, not fixed meanings, since every viewer may see a painting differently.

Results

The Starry Night was painted in June 1889, while Van Gogh was staying at the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole institution in Saint-Rémy, in southern France [MISSING: source]. It is among his most recognizable works, and in it he treated the sky not merely as a landscape but as an expression of inner emotion. The first thing that catches the viewer's eye is the sky itself. Van Gogh does not simply paint a night sky; he makes it feel alive. The swirling clouds, glowing stars, crescent moon, and restless movement suggest feelings too big for ordinary language. Below, the village appears quiet, while the heavens above seem to move constantly. This contrast may remind us that a person can look calm on the outside and live in a very different world within.



Figure 1. *Vincent van Gogh, The Starry Night, 1889. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

The deep blue shades, bright stars, and swirling lines give the painting its emotional force. Through vivid color and strong contrasts, Van Gogh developed a style that later became influential in the development of modern art [MISSING: source]. The tall, shadowy cypress tree in the foreground matters too. It adds depth to the composition and links the land to the sky, and its upward-reaching shape leads the viewer's eye toward the heavens, suggesting a bond between everyday life and the vastness of the universe. Perhaps *The Starry Night* reminds us that emotions do not always need to be explained to be understood; sometimes they only need to be felt.

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Wheatfield with Crows creates a different, though equally strong, mood. Where *The Starry Night* is full of motion, this painting, made in July 1890, shows a large golden wheat field under a dramatic blue sky, with several black crows flying above it and winding paths running through the wheat [MISSING: source]. Van Gogh uses bright colors and bold brushstrokes to build a strong emotional atmosphere, and the painting is especially interesting because it communicates feeling without a single word. Its style invites viewers to stop, look closely, and think about its deeper meaning. People who look at it may feel a mixture of sadness, curiosity, uncertainty, and even peace. The seemingly endless field can lead to thoughts about life and the future, although every viewer may read the painting in a different way.



Figure 2. *Vincent van Gogh, Wheatfield with Crows, 1890. Oil on canvas. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.*

The black crows may stand for freedom, uncertainty, or the unknown. As they cross the dramatic sky, they give the scene a mysterious feel, and their flight can also suggest a wish to escape or to move toward something unfamiliar. The winding path can be read as a metaphor for the journey of life. It reminds us that life is full of choices, challenges, and unexpected turns, and just as the path disappears into the distance, we cannot always predict what the future holds. This detail encourages viewers to stay courageous even when the way ahead is unclear. In this landscape, Van Gogh shows how ordinary natural elements can become symbols of human experience and emotion.

Discussion

Taken together, these paintings show that art can express feelings that are hard to put into words. In *The Starry Night*, the restless sky set against the quiet village below creates an atmosphere that reflects the complexity of human emotion. *Wheatfield with Crows*, meanwhile, presents a scene that invites reflection on uncertainty, solitude, freedom, and the unknown. Although the two works show different settings, they share one thing: both turn a natural landscape into a picture of an inner state. Instead of describing his feelings directly in words, Van Gogh

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chose to show them through his art. This suggests that art can build a personal connection between the artist and the viewer. Each person reads a work differently, drawing on their own experiences, memories, and emotions, so the meaning of a painting is not limited to what the artist intended. It can grow and change through the viewer's own experience.

Conclusion

The legacy of Vincent van Gogh reminds us that people do not communicate only through words. Sometimes a color can express what language cannot, and a landscape can show the complexity of a feeling more clearly than a direct explanation. In *The Starry Night*, Van Gogh turned the sky into a place of movement, imagination, and possibility. In *Wheatfield with Crows*, he created a scene that can hold uncertainty, solitude, and the close relationship between human emotions and nature. Van Gogh gained widespread recognition mainly after his death [MISSING: source], yet his influence still inspires people around the world. His life and work remind us that recognition may not come right away, but sincere creativity can leave a lasting mark.

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