THE FIRST MASTERPIECE



- 0. THE FIRST MASTERPIECE Story Preface
- 1. EARLY LIFE
- 2. AN ARTIST IS BORN
- 3. STUDYING ART, FEELING PAIN

4. THE FIRST MASTERPIECE

- 5. THE PARIS YEARS
- 6. INFLUENCE of JAPANESE ART
- 7. EARLY LIFE in ARLES
- 8. THE BANDAGED EAR
- 9. VINCENT at SAINT-REMY
- 10. THE ATTACKS CONTINUE
- 11. PAINTING in AUVERS-sur-OISE
- 12. WORRIES and TURMOIL
- 13. VINCENT COMMITS SUICIDE
- 14. THE SADNESS WILL LAST FOREVER



Vincent van Gogh created his first "masterpiece" while living with his parents in Nuenen, The Netherlands, during 1885. The version of "The Potato Eaters" depicted in this image, which Vincent finished in April of 1885, measures 83 x 116 cm. The oil-on-canvas original is maintained at the van Gogh Museum, in Amsterdam.

Vincent preferred <u>practical work</u> to academic study, and he continued to <u>develop</u> his technique in Nuenen. Living with his parents at the vicarage (pastor's home), he convinced his father to turn the laundry (at the <u>rear of the house</u>) into a <u>studio</u>.

Painting the front and drawing the back of the home, Vincent used dark colors which characterized his work during this time frame. He had not yet discovered the vibrant color palette which he later used to create so many masterworks.

Vincent's relationship with his father became strained, especially after his failed attempts to marry Kee Vos. (His parents had strongly criticized his antics at the time.) So ... when his father died, in March of 1885, Vincent was only briefly distracted from creating a series of <u>peasant portraits</u>. This work was the prelude to his first masterpiece: *The Potato Eaters*.

As he sketched and painted the people who <u>lived</u> and worked <u>in Nuenen</u>, Vincent also planned the scene of his famous painting. In <u>one drawing</u>, created during March and April of 1885, he sketched both the inside of a cottage and a group of people eating there. He also <u>produced</u> other drawings, a <u>study for the painting</u> and an <u>early version</u> of it.

Vincent wanted to portray a gloomy environment, but the painting needed enough light for people to comprehend it. He also wanted to do something else: To paint his subjects' faces

the color of a good, dusty potato, unpeeled naturally.

Although van Gogh was pleased with the result, not everyone agreed with his analysis. The <u>negative comments</u> of one artist - Anthon van Rappard - caused Vincent <u>to end</u> their friendship. (For commentary on <u>The Potato</u> <u>Eaters</u>, which is owned by the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, <u>click here</u>.)

By the end of 1885, Vincent believed he had accomplished as much as he could in his own country. Needing new challenges, and wishing to explore other forms of artistic expression, he spent a short time in Antwerp.

He quickly realized Paris might be a better environment for him. His brother Theo lived there, as did a group of artists we know as the Impressionists.

Vincent's artistic efforts were about to take on entirely new horizons.

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Media Stream



Old Station at Eindhoven - van Gogh Image online, courtesy Web Gallery of Art.

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Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in the Snow

Image online, courtesy Web Gallery of Art.

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Back of the House in Nuenen - Vincent's Art Studio

Image online, courtesy <u>University of Seville</u> (a Spanish-language website) and its illustrated biography of Vincent van Gogh.

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Studio in Nuenen - Vincent van Gogh

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Head of a Peasant Woman with White Cap

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The Cottage - van Gogh Painting Image online, courtesy Web Gallery of Art. PD

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Autumn Landscape with Four Trees

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Sketch for The Potato Eaters

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Four People Sharing a Meal

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The Potato Eaters - An Early Version

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Nuenen Vicarage - Vincent's Drawing

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Study for The Potato Eaters

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The Potato Eaters - Vincent's First Masterpiece

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Vicarage at Nuenen - van Gogh Painting

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