

# 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.

*Unfortunately, due to the high licensing costs, I cannot show Vincent's paintings in this book.*

*Vincent's work 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 "The story of Vincent in Drenthe" (ISBN 9789465014593). In that book you can read what happened to Vincent during his stay in Drenthe. He stayed there for three months in the autumn of 1883. His highs and lows, but especially the conclusion that Vincent himself got aware of during that stay. In Drenthe, Vincent discovered the purpose of his life, his destiny: To be a skilled and successful painter and no longer be dependent on Theo's financial support.

His journey to that goal begins with his departure from Drenthe. This journey takes him to:

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 Auvers-sur-Oise we meet Vincent, and he tells us about his experiences during that long journey.

We don't know exactly what he experienced in those places. The approximately five hundred letters that Vincent wrote after his departure from Drenthe up to and including his stay in Auvers-sur-Oise only provide a limited picture. Unfortunately, except for a small number, the letters Vincent received from Theo, his parents and artist friends are no longer there. But we can deduce something from Vincent's reactions in the letters he wrote.

The meetings and conversations he had are events that I have made up myself. The story is therefore a mix of fiction and non-fiction. Vincent's meeting with Alex de Goede is completely fictional. Yet Vincent writes in the letter of June 17, 1890: "*I was pleased 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, be course in my books, I let Vincent himself speak.

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

- Vincent regularly suffers from depressive moods. Back then it was called melancholy. The only effective way for Vincent to suppress melancholy was to paint a lot and seek distraction.
- Vincent has never actually earned any money himself since his dismissal from Goupil on April 1, 1876. He has therefore always been dependent on what Theo and sometimes his father gave him. He is always short of money. As a result, he cannot always paint and draw, which could cause melancholy to arise again.

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

Enjoy reading.

Ruud Hobo - Drenthe 2023 / 2024

## **2 Auvers-sur-Oise July 1890**

### **Thursday, July 10, 1890 – afternoon – The Meeting**

Let me introduce myself. My name is Alex de Goede, I'm 48 years old. I am a traveling salesman by profession. I trade in anything that I can make a profit from. This could be trading in wood, peat, tobacco, coal, etc. An interesting emerging market for the Netherlands is the wine trade. Wine consumption in the Netherlands has fallen considerably in recent decades, but the signs are good. The market is starting to pick up again and I see opportunities ahead of me. Last year I went to Paris and made good contacts with French wine merchants at the World Exhibition. I spent a lot of time on that again last week in Paris.

Without boasting too much, I can say that I am quite good at my job. I know where demand is, and I have a good insight into where demand for certain goods will arise. I then respond to that. In this way, for example, I have earned quite a lot of money in the peat trade in the Netherlands. Because things are going so well financially, I don't have to work six days a week from early in the morning until late at night like I did at the start of my career in trading. This gives me time for other things. I am interested in art, especially painting. Not to trade in or to hang on the wall at home, but out of pure interest. Paintings belong in a museum so that anyone who wants can see them, in my humble opinion. I am also interested in the story behind a painting or the life of the painter. I like to visit museums at home and abroad. As a traveling salesman, I visit many places and if there is a museum, I can combine my business stay in that city with a visit to that museum. An ever-expanding railway network makes many places easier to reach. And much faster and more comfortable than with a horse and cart as in my first 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 visited a few theatre performances and various exhibitions of the famous French masters. Unfortunately, there has been little innovation to be seen from these painters lately.

In my opinion the works of the so-called Impressionists are more interesting. I have the feeling that this movement or school could become very big in a few years. Maybe just buy a few of those works as an investment. I should think about it. I have already done some orientation because I was in Paris anyway. I visited a large showroom of



Boussod, Valadon & Cie on the Boulevard Montmartre. This showroom appears to be run by a Dutchman. Unfortunately, that man was not there. I didn't hear his name either.

In Paris, the first preparations started this morning for Quatorze Juillet, the national holiday next Monday. This holiday is still quite new. It was not until 1880 that July 14 was declared a national holiday. That was only ten years ago. I don't want to deal with all that hustle and bustle, so this morning I took a carriage from my hotel in Paris to the Gare du Nord station. I'm going to enjoy the beautiful French landscape and the surrounding nature for a few days. Because I'm not expected back in the Netherlands until Wednesday, I have plenty of time for that. On the advice of several painters, I spoke to at an exhibition in the Salon, I took the train to Auvers-sur-Oise. That's a village north of Paris. In that village there is an inn near the station opposite the town hall where you can also eat well, so I was told. I therefore reserved a room by telegraph.

It was a beautiful journey through a hilly area. I arrived at the little station of Auvers-sur-Oise at the beginning of the afternoon. After a short walk I found the lodging, The Ravoux Inn, indeed opposite the 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 standing in front of this guest house, you would see two windows on the first floor. The right one is from my room. I have a beautiful view of the town hall from the room.

Adeline, the daughter of the manager Ravoux, told me that room five on the second floor is also occupied by a Dutchman. That's 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. He's not back yet. I hear that but pay little attention to it because I have spoken to enough painters in recent days. Adeline does suggest that I 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. It also seems that he is regularly bullied by boys in the village. That painter only has contact with doctor Gachet who lives further away. Maybe he's just there to see Marguerite, the doctor's

daughter. It doesn't escape my notice that she sounds a little jealous. "But he has already made a few beautiful paintings of me," she says.



Photo 1 Auberge Ravoux

After I brought my luggage to the room and had lunch, I went for a walk through the beautiful nature around Auvers. If you walk along the main road to the east, you can turn left opposite the bridge over the Oise and go up. You will then pass a beautiful church. A large building with a beautiful architectural style. Really something to paint, in my opinion. Via the hills I arrived at another small station in Chaponval. From there you walk in an almost straight line back to the inn. When I returned, I freshened up in my room.

Now I'm sitting on the small terrace in front of the inn. Adeline and her sister Germaine are also there. They tell me they've only had this inn for a year. The owner, mister Levert, rents this building to them and artists regularly come to stay with them. Just like that Dutchman she told me about. Once or twice a week, Nicolás Martínez Valdivieso comes by to have dinner with the painter. That's a Spanish artist who lives nearby. Not this week because he is visiting family in Spain. Adeline has the impression that this Spaniard doesn't feel like dealing with the hustle and

bustle surrounding the July 14th holiday. Enjoying a delicious French wine and some local delicacies, I stay seated for a while.

In the distance I see a man with painting supplies coming out of a side road. I immediately get a sense of *déjà vu*. That man looks familiar. The moment he walks past my table to enter the inn, I recognize him.

"Mister, are you Vincent van Gogh, the painter?" I shout.

He stops abruptly and looks at me with a look of 'where do I know you from?'.

"I'm Alex de Goede. We met each other about six years ago in Nuenen. You then told me about your stay in Drenthe," I continue.

Soon a big smile appears on his face.

"I recognize you. You are indeed the man who visited me in Nuenen to listen to my story. How nice to see you again. I'll just take my stuff upstairs and then I'll be right back."

When he returns, he still has a big grin on his face. Adeline has placed 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. "Know is a big word," I answer, "but we've spoken before. I honestly didn't know he's here too. That's a big surprise for me."

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

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

"Of course, I have plenty of time. I won't be heading back to the Netherlands until Sunday or Monday. But tell me, did you come here from Nuenen? You then talked about possibly going to Antwerp."

"After being in Nuenen for almost 2 years, I indeed went to Antwerp. I took some drawing and painting lessons there. That was not a success. Waste of my time. Then on to Paris. Lived with my brother Theo for two years. After those two years I was more than tired of the busy city. I dreamed of starting a painting colony in the south, in Arles, with my painter friend Paul Gauguin. That was also not a success. I collapsed mentally and was admitted for a year to a kind of psychiatric hospital in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, a village near Arles. Last May I had been in that hospital for about a year, and I felt that I had recovered sufficiently. I then went to Paris, where I met Jo, Theo's wife, for the first time. And of course I saw their son, my nephew, for the first time. They named that little boy Vincent, after his great uncle. I am very proud of that. I've been

here since mid-May. I'm having a good time here; I'm enjoying painting and I'm 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."

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

As I told you in Nuenen, Alex, I went from Drenthe to my parents in Nuenen early December 1883. Unfortunately, I left the lodging in New Amsterdam leaving behind several drawings and paintings that were not yet finished. I assumed they would keep them for me because I would be back soon. At least early the next spring. I still remember that trip well. My trip to Nuenen started with a walk of more than six hours through the heath and along the canal to Hogeveen. It was a stormy morning with lots of rain and snow. It sounds strange, but this walk calmed me down. In Hogeveen I picked up my things from Albertus Hartsuiker. I travelled by train to Eindhoven and after that I walked the last stretch to Nuenen. I was really dreading going back to live with my parents. And they weren't really looking forward to my arrival either. They weren't happy about it at all. It was anything but a cordial reunion. What disappointed me was that my father's opinion about me and his attitude towards me had not changed at all. It clashed again as usual. You must realize that two years earlier I had been kicked out of the house. During my stay in Drenthe I wrote to my parents several times that I might return for a short period and hoped that the differences of opinion could be put aside. From my side anyway. But my father turned out not to be able to do that. He remained harsh in his judgment of me.

My sister Willemien and brother Cor also lived in the parsonage in Nuenen. This made the house quite full. I was given the barn, a space behind the parsonage. I could live and work there. So, I didn't have to be in the house often. My father had forbidden me to enter the house. I got the impression that he saw me as some kind of sheepdog that comes into the room with wet paws and dirty the whole place. I am still angry about that. That's not good, partly because I soon discovered that my father couldn't understand me when I tried to explain something to him. It's been over six and a half years now, so I need to put it to rest. To my reassurance, both Theo and my friend Anthon van Rappard supported my decision to return to my parents.

Soon I went back to The Hague. In the meantime, the space in the barn of the parsonage was cleared. After my return from The Hague, I was able to set it up as my studio. I still had some things in storage in The Hague. These included studies, prints and some other items. I packed it up and sent it to Nuenen. I also spent a day with Van Rappard to admire the paintings he had made on Terschelling. I thought they were really beautiful. I also visited Sien in The Hague. That was difficult because I still got feelings for her. It had only been three months since I left her. I knew that living together with her and the kids was no longer possible. Starting over was not an option. Yet it continued to gnaw. I still thought about her regularly. I wrote that to Theo several times, probably to get it out of my mind. I still stood by the decision not to continue with her. At Christmas that year I was back in Nuenen.

*'Vincent, you were first sent away from The Hague, and you left Sien and the children. Things didn't go as you had hoped in Drenthe and the welcome from your parents was not too warm either. This period must have been very difficult for you.'*

That's right Alex. Indeed, it was all unpleasant. I had the greatest difficulty suppressing an attack of melancholy. That was also one of the reasons why I went back to The Hague quite quickly. I had to leave Nuenen for a while to think about how I could deal with this. You can imagine that after such a welcoming by your own parents. I decided that once I lived in Nuenen I would regularly look for opportunities to rent a studio somewhere else in the village where I could 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 forget about it.

In Drenthe I concluded that I wanted to be a painter for the rest of my life. I had discovered my destiny, a lifetime of painting. I really felt "I am a painter" from the moment I left Drenthe. I just had to improve my skills further. I was far from being the accomplished and successful painter I wanted to be. I understood that too. I immediately envisioned it as a journey where I would go to other cities or countries to learn skills and sell my work there. I would only be successful if I sold enough and was therefore no longer financially dependent on Theo. During my time at Goupil, I had already lived in several places such as Paris and London. That had given me a good idea of the possibilities for me.