

Vincent Van Gogh's "The Starry Night"

Xinjie Zhou

Shanghai Starriver Bilingual School, Shanghai, China

Abstract. This study provides an in-depth analysis of Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, focusing on its artistic style, emotional expression, and symbolic meanings. By examining the painting's use of color, brushstroke techniques, and composition, the research reveals how van Gogh conveyed his inner turmoil and mental struggles through innovative visual elements. The swirling night sky, contrasting lights and darks, and vibrant colors reflect themes of isolation, longing, and existential reflection. This analysis also considers the psychological and emotional dimensions of van Gogh's work, offering a deeper understanding of the artist's personal struggles and the broader human experience. The study contributes to the scholarly discourse on van Gogh's art, highlighting the psychological aspects of his creations. Furthermore, it opens pathways for future research on the intersection of art and psychology, offering valuable insights into the emotional depth of other artists and their work.

Keywords: Vincent van Gogh, artistic style, emotional expression, symbolic meanings.

1. Introduction

Vincent van Gogh is a Dutch painter from the late 19th century, renowned for his expressive works, vibrant colors, and unique brushstroke style. *The Starry Night*, one of his most iconic paintings, not only vividly showcases his artistic characteristics but also embodies his complex emotions and mental state. Since its creation in 1889, this painting has become a classic in the global art history and has had a profound influence on subsequent artists and art movements. Therefore, a detailed study of *The Starry Night* is of significant academic value in understanding van Gogh's artistic creation, his inner world, and his place in the history of world art.

Van Gogh's works are known for their strong emotional expression and innovative artistic techniques (Borlido et al., 2024). As one of his most well-known paintings, *The Starry Night* has frequently been the focus of academic research. Many studies have concentrated on interpreting van Gogh's artistic style, emotional expression, and the influence of his mental state on his creative process. However, the multiple interpretations of *The Starry Night* within different cultural contexts and the deeper philosophical meanings hidden behind the painting remain a field worthy of further exploration.

The significance of this research lies in its multifaceted approach to exploring the deeper meanings of *The Starry Night* and the psychological motivations behind van Gogh's creation. By analyzing the visual elements, artistic techniques, historical background, and van Gogh's personal experiences, this study aims to offer new perspectives and deeper insights into the artwork, contributing to fields such as art history, psychology, and cultural studies (Giang, 2024). Furthermore, this research seeks to enrich the comprehensive assessment of van Gogh's artistic contributions and explore his place and influence in the modern history of art.

The theme of this study is an in-depth analysis of van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, focusing on its artistic style, emotional expression, symbolic meanings, and the mental struggles behind its creation (Khristawan & Widodo, 2023). The research will examine the painting's visual elements, such as color usage, brushstroke techniques, and composition, while also considering van Gogh's personal beliefs and mental state, to reveal the emotions and philosophical implications hidden within the artwork.

This study combines literature review and art analysis methods (Ma, et al., 2024). First, by systematically reviewing existing research literature on van Gogh, we will gather scholarly views and findings related to *The Starry Night*. Second, a detailed analysis of the painting's artistic elements—such as color application, brushstroke techniques, and composition—will be conducted, considering

van Gogh's personal biography and the historical context of his artistic creation (Qi, 2024). Additionally, psychological and cultural semiotics theories will be applied to explore the symbolic meanings of the painting and its emotional expression.

The primary objective of this research is to interpret the symbolic meanings and emotional content within *The Starry Night*, and to analyze how van Gogh's personal experiences influenced the creation of the painting. Through a comprehensive analysis of the artwork, this study aims to reveal the uniqueness of van Gogh's artistic creation and how he used this painting to express his inner struggles and profound reflections on life. Moreover, the research will explore the global cultural significance of *The Starry Night* and its impact on subsequent art movements.

2. Background

Vincent van Gogh is one of the most influential post-impressionist painters in art history. His works are characterized by their intense emotional power and unique artistic style. "*The Starry Night*", painted in 1889 while he was staying at the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, is a masterpiece that has captured the imagination of viewers around the world for centuries. This painting not only showcases Van Gogh's remarkable technical skills but also gives insight into his inner thoughts and unique perception of the universe.

The composition of "*The Starry Night*" is dominated by a swirling sky filled with bright stars and a large, crescent moon (Ruzaidi, 2022). However, instead of depicting the astronomical figures, such as the stars and the moon in detail, Van Gogh selected the method of giving them contorting and twisting lines, simulating the effect of the obscure and glowing spheres in the universe. The village below appears small and peaceful in contrast, with its church spire reaching towards the heavens. The cypress tree on the left side of the painting stands out as a dark, vertical element that seems to connect the earth and the sky. This contrast between the dynamic sky and the relatively static village creates a sense of tension and harmony simultaneously, drawing the viewer's eye across the canvas and inviting us to explore the relationship between the peaceful landscape on earth and the chaotic scene in the sky.

3. Case Analysis

Color plays a crucial role in Van Gogh's artistic expression in "*The Starry Night*". He employs a vivid palette, with deep blues and purples dominating the sky, which gives a sense of mystery and infinity. The bright yellow of the stars and the moon stands out against this dark backdrop, creating a powerful visual impact and evoking a feeling of hope and light in the midst of the nocturnal scene (Rajbhandari, 2024). The warm oranges and yellows used for the village buildings add a touch of human warmth and stability to the overall composition. Van Gogh's bold use of complementary colors, such as the contrast between blue and yellow, intensifies the emotional and visual energy of the painting.

The brushwork in "*The Starry Night*" is highly distinctive and contributes significantly to its overall texture and mood (Spreafico & Tramuns, 2021). Van Gogh used thick, swirling brushstrokes to depict the sky, giving the impression of a moving and turbulent cosmos. These energetic strokes seem to convey the artist's own inner turmoil and his passionate engagement with the subject matter (Varsha, 2024). In contrast, the brushstrokes used for the village and the cypress tree are more controlled and defined, emphasizing the solidity and stillness of these elements on the ground. The combination of these different types of brushwork adds depth and complexity to the painting, making it come alive with a sense of movement and vitality.

Many art historians and critics have speculated about the possible symbolic meanings in "*The Starry Night*". The cypress tree, often associated with death and mourning in Western culture, might represent Van Gogh's awareness of his troubled mental state and his proximity to mortality during that period of his life (Xiaodi et al., 2023). On the other hand, the stars and the moon could symbolize

hope, inspiration, or a longing for something greater beyond the earthly realm. The village, with its church at the center, might evoke a sense of community and spiritual refuge, suggesting that even in the face of personal struggles, there is a place of solace and connection.

However, Van Gogh's devotion to this painting might be just one corner of his wandering mind. When he spotted such a scene, Van Gogh might be experiencing quite a joyous mood when taking a stroll through the fields. He was then hit by a sudden stream of inspiration, which swirls in his mind just like the night sky he depicted in the painting. Through this sudden pang of inspiration he gave existence to this magnificent piece of artwork.

In conclusion, Vincent van Gogh's "*The Starry Night*" is a multi-faceted work of art that offers a wealth of opportunities for analysis. Through its carefully crafted visual elements, masterful use of color, expressive brushwork, and potential symbolic meanings, it continues to fascinate and move audiences today. By delving into the details of this painting, we can gain a more profound appreciation of Van Gogh's artistic vision and the power of art to communicate complex emotions and ideas. This analysis also serves as a reminder of how art can transcend time and space, inviting us to enter the unique world created by the artist and experience it on both a visual and an emotional level.

Vincent van Gogh's "*The Starry Night*" is one of the most renowned and iconic paintings in the history of art. Painted in 1889, it showcases his unique artistic style and emotional expression. This paper will analyze the drawing process and methods used in this masterpiece.

4. Drawing Process

The Starry Night, painted by Vincent van Gogh in 1889, is a masterpiece that continues to captivate audiences worldwide. Executed in oil on canvas, the painting depicts the view from the east-facing window of his room at the Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, France. Despite being based on his memories and imagination rather than a direct observation, the work is a testament to van Gogh's unique artistic vision and emotional depth.

At first glance, the painting's most striking feature is its intense, swirling brushstrokes. The sky is a maelstrom of blues and purples, with the stars rendered as bright, swirling orbs that seem to pulsate with energy. The cypress tree in the foreground, a symbol of death and mourning in Western culture, reaches up towards the sky like a dark, twisted flame. The small village below, with its neat rows of houses and church spire, appears peaceful in contrast to the turbulent sky above.

Van Gogh's use of color in *The Starry Night* is equally remarkable. The deep blues and purples of the sky create a sense of depth and mystery, while the bright yellows and oranges of the stars and moon provide a stark contrast, emphasizing their otherworldly brilliance. The use of complementary colors, such as blue and orange, heightens the emotional impact of the painting, creating a sense of tension and drama.

The emotional power of *The Starry Night* lies in its ability to convey van Gogh's inner turmoil and spiritual yearning. Despite the chaos and turbulence of the sky, there is a sense of tranquility and hope in the painting, symbolized by the bright stars and the peaceful village below. The cypress tree, often associated with death and mourning, also represents the cycle of life and the eternal nature of the soul.

In conclusion, *The Starry Night* is a masterpiece of post-impressionist art that continues to inspire and move audiences today. Through his use of bold colors, swirling brushstrokes, and symbolic imagery, van Gogh created a painting that is both a visual representation of his inner world and a universal expression of human emotion and spiritual longing.

4.1. Sketching

Before applying colors, van Gogh likely started with a rough sketch to plan the composition. In "*The Starry Night*", we can observe that he carefully laid out the position of the village, the cypress tree, and the swirling sky. The sketch would have helped him determine the proportions and the general layout of the elements on the canvas. For example, the placement of the church spire in relation to the houses and the way the curving lines of the hills connect with the rest of the scene

would have been initially outlined in a simple sketch. This stage is crucial as it sets the foundation for the entire painting.

4.2. Layering of paints

Van Gogh built up the painting through layers of paint. He first applied a base layer, perhaps a lighter color for the background of the sky and the ground. Then, he started adding thicker layers on top. For the sky, he used short, rapid brushstrokes to create the swirling effect of the stars and the clouds. These layers were added one after another, with each layer enhancing the texture and depth. In the area of the village, he might have first painted the general shapes of the buildings with a flat color and then added details like the windows and doors with additional layers of paint, using smaller brushes for finer work.

4.3. Development of the Central Motifs

The cypress tree in the foreground is a significant element. Van Gogh would have painted it gradually, starting with its basic shape and then adding the details of its branches and the way it sways. The stars were painted with bright dots and short lines radiating from them, giving the impression of their twinkling. He continued to refine these central motifs throughout the painting process, constantly adjusting the colors and the intensity of the brushstrokes to make them stand out and convey the desired mood.

5. Drawing Methods

5.1. Use of color

Color plays a vital role in "*The Starry Night*". Van Gogh chose a vivid and contrasting color palette. The deep blues and purples of the sky contrast with the warm yellows and oranges of the stars and the moon. The greenish-blue of the cypress tree also stands out against the lighter background of the village. He used these colors not just to represent the objects realistically but also to create an emotional atmosphere. The bold use of color helps to make the painting visually striking and full of energy, expressing his inner turmoil and his sense of the grandeur of the night sky.

5.2. Brushstroke technique

His brushstroke technique is highly distinctive. Van Gogh employed short, thick, and often curved brushstrokes. In the sky, these strokes swirl and twist, mimicking the movement of the wind and the clouds. The strokes for the cypress tree give it a sense of life and movement as if it is swaying in the breeze. For the village, the more regular and straight brushstrokes used for the buildings give a sense of stability compared to the chaotic energy of the sky. This variation in brushstroke style adds to the dynamism and complexity of the painting.

5.3. Perspective and composition

In terms of perspective, van Gogh distorted the normal perspective to some extent to emphasize certain elements. The cypress tree looms large in the foreground, while the village in the distance seems relatively small, creating a sense of depth. The composition is carefully balanced with the curving lines of the sky and the cypress tree guiding the viewer's eye around the painting. The stars are scattered in a way that leads the eye to explore different parts of the canvas, making the whole painting an engaging visual experience.

In conclusion, Vincent van Gogh's "*The Starry Night*" is a result of a meticulous drawing process and the application of unique drawing methods. From the initial sketching to the final touches of color and brushstrokes, every step contributed to creating a painting that not only captures a beautiful night scene but also conveys powerful emotions and a sense of the artist's vision. His innovative use of

color, brushstroke technique, and composition has made this work an eternal masterpiece in the world of art.

6. Discussion

The painting is dominated by blue and black tones. Blue represents Van Gogh's inner melancholy and pain, while black adds a sense of oppression to the picture. The yellow stars and moon, on the other hand, symbolize hope and light, embodying his yearning for a better life. Van Gogh employed unique strip - like brushstrokes that interweave and swirl, creating a strong sense of movement and rhythm in the painting. For example, the nebulae in the sky, with their swirling brushstrokes, seem to make the stars appear to be flowing. *The Starry Night* provided important inspiration for 20th - century Expressionist painting. Expressionism emphasizes the expression of inner emotions and subjective feelings. Van Gogh's use of exaggerated colors and distorted lines to express his spiritual world paved the way for Expressionist painters. It is often used in the field of art education as a classic example to help students understand the painting style, color application, and expression techniques of Post - Impressionism, inspiring students' creativity and understanding of art.

As one of Van Gogh's masterpieces, *The Starry Night* has extremely high artistic and market value. Due to its historical significance and artistic status, it is regarded as a priceless treasure and is housed in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, one of the important collections of the some art market evaluations and discussions, if *The Starry Night* were to be auctioned, its price might set a new record in the art market. *The Starry Night* has become an important symbol of art culture, representing Van Gogh's unique artistic style and spiritual world, as well as symbolizing humanity's pursuit and exploration of art. There are an endless number of derivative works based on *The Starry Night*, covering various art forms. For example, the film *Loving Vincent* presents Van Gogh's art world and his life story in a unique oil - painting animation form.

7. Conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, focusing on its artistic style, emotional depth, symbolic meanings, and the psychological factors influencing its creation. Through detailed exploration of the visual elements—such as color, composition, and brushstroke techniques—it has been revealed that van Gogh employed innovative methods to express his inner turmoil and longing for peace. The symbolism embedded in the swirling night sky, the contrasting light and dark, and the vibrant yet chaotic use of color all serve as reflections of van Gogh's complex emotional and mental state. Additionally, the painting's timeless appeal can be attributed to its universal themes of isolation, struggle, and the desire for connection, making it not only an artistic masterpiece but also a profound statement on human existence.

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