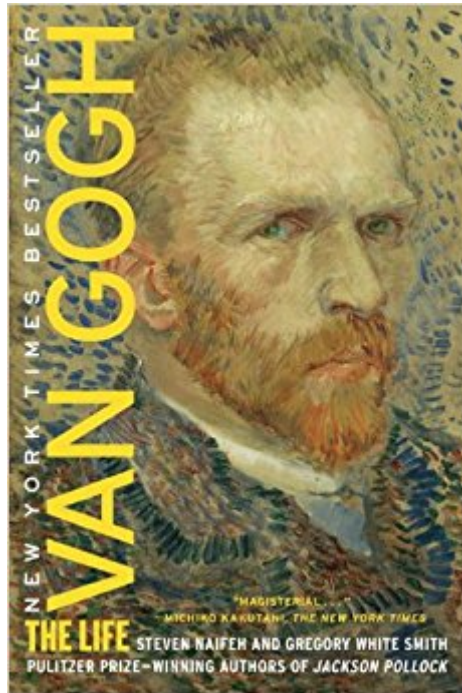




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# Van Gogh: The Life



## Synopsis

Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, who galvanized readers with their Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Jackson Pollock, have written another tour de force—an exquisitely detailed, compellingly readable portrait of Vincent van Gogh. Working with the full cooperation of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, Naifeh and Smith have accessed a wealth of previously untapped materials to bring a crucial understanding to the larger-than-life mythology of this great artist: his early struggles to find his place in the world; his intense relationship with his brother Theo; and his move to Provence, where he painted some of the best-loved works in Western art. The authors also shed new light on many unexplored aspects of Van Gogh's inner world: his erratic and tumultuous romantic life; his bouts of depression and mental illness; and the cloudy circumstances surrounding his death at the age of thirty-seven. Though countless books have been written about Van Gogh, no serious, ambitious examination of his life has been attempted in more than seventy years. Naifeh and Smith have re-created Van Gogh's life with an astounding vividness and psychological acuity that bring a completely new and sympathetic understanding to this unique artistic genius. NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER Praise for *Van Gogh: The Life* “Magisterial.” —Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* “This generation’s definitive portrait of the great Dutch post-Impressionist.” —Time “A tour de force . . . an enormous achievement . . . Reading his life story is like riding an endless roller coaster of delusional highs and lows. . . . [A] sweepingly authoritative, astonishingly textured book.” —Los Angeles Times “Marvelous . . . [Van Gogh] reads like a novel, full of suspense and intimate detail. . . . In beautiful prose, Naifeh and Smith argue convincingly for a subtler, more realistic evaluation of Van Gogh, and we all win.” —The Washington Post “Brilliant . . . At once a model of scholarship and an emotive, pacy chunk of hagiography.” —The Daily Telegraph (London) A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY THE WASHINGTON POST THE WALL STREET JOURNAL SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE NPR THE ECONOMIST NEWSDAY BOOKREPORTER

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“The definitive biography for decades to come.”—Leo Jansen, curator, the Van Gogh Museum, and co-editor of Vincent van Gogh: The Complete Letters  
“In their magisterial new biography, Van Gogh: The Life, Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith provide a guided tour through the personal world and work of that Dutch painter, shining a bright light on the evolution of his art. . . . What [the authors] capture so powerfully is Van Gogh’s extraordinary will to learn, to persevere against the odds.”—Michiko Kakutani, The New York Times  
“Captivating . . . Winners of the 1991 Pulitzer Prize for their biography of Jackson Pollock, [Naifeh and Smith] bring a booming authorial voice and boundless ingenuity to the task and have written a thoroughly engaging account of the Dutch painter. Drawing on Van Gogh’s almost uniquely rich correspondence . . . the authors vividly reconstruct the intertwined stories of his life and his art, portraying him as a victim of his own fanatic heart. . . . Their fine book has the potential not only to reinvigorate the broad base of popular interest that Van Gogh already enjoys but to introduce a whole new generation to one of art history’s most remarkable creative spirits.”—Jonathan Lopez, The Wall Street Journal  
“Could very well be the definitive biography . . . In it we get a much fuller view of Van Gogh, owing to the decade Naifeh and Smith spent on research to create this scholarly and spellbinding work. . . . How pleased we should be that [these authors] have rendered so exquisitely

and respectfully Van Gogh's short, intense, and wholly interesting life. •Roberta Silman, The Boston Globe "This generation's definitive portrait of the great Dutch post-Impressionist . . . [The authors'] most important achievement is to produce a reckoning with Van Gogh's occasional madness that doesn't lose sight of the lucidity and intelligence •the profound sanity •of his art. •Richard Lacayo, Time "Brilliant . . . Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith are the big-game hunters of modern art history. . . . [Van Gogh] rushes along on a tide of research. . . . At once a model of scholarship and an emotive, pacy chunk of hagiography. •Martin Herbert, The Daily Telegraph (London)

Absolutely brilliant biography. The scope of the authors staggers me. To bring the complete picture, they immersed themselves in the attitudes of the people of the time, and amazingly grasped the salient features from the influential authors and novels of the era, especially Zola. The authors utterly digested the thousands of letters between Vincent and, not only Theo, but all of his family and friends. They took account of all the many testimonies and interviews recorded by people who knew Vincent. I learned so much that I am still processing the information. Many times I felt like putting the book down because Vincent was so unpleasant, ungrateful and discourteous. He brought so much of his trouble onto himself . . . but knowledge that this disagreeable fellow produced works of art that changed the course of Modernism and has brought so much pleasure to so many kept me going. In the end, my sympathies were won over, especially when it becomes clear that Vincent truly suffered some sort of mental illness (temporal lobe epilepsy?). I dreaded the end when it came, but am fascinated by the information about the shooting death. Can't believe for a moment that Vincent intended to end his life that day - but as it becomes clear, he was not willing to fight against dying. What a book - what a reading experience - what an artist!

This is a VERY detailed, well-documented biography of Van Gogh. It is very long - over 800 pages, but it has provided many insights that I had not known. The struggles Van Gogh went through with both mental illness and learning to be an artist were arduous. You will end up wondering what being his brother must have been like! I am a docent at a major art museum and will definitely use this information when describing Van Gogh to our visitors.

Stunning in the amount of detail and yet never dry or boring this is as an extensive and insightful

biography as any I've read. The authors collaborated and yet the style of the writing is so engaging and consistent throughout that it seems the work of a single author. Van Gogh is traced from childhood through his troubled young adulthood and emerges here as a tortured soul striving for understanding and a place in the world who intimately translated those longings into his art. Beautifully written, massive in scope, detail and informative while entertaining, this is a model for what good biography should and can be. You leave this book feeling like you know Van Gogh the way you know members of your own family. Using the letters Vincent wrote to his brother as a primary source in a narrative that very effectively merges the circumstances of his life with his inner torment and struggles results in a dissection of the man's evolution as an artist and his emotional neediness that is at once disturbing and powerful. This is a long read but for me the pages flew and I loved being immersed in this man's life and world for a time. If you have an interest in Van Gogh or this period of art history you simply cannot miss this book. It will enrich your appreciation and stay with you for a very long time. An investment in time that is well worth it. Bravo !

I've never been so moved and so completely disturbed by any book before. Vincent Van Gogh was a brilliant person who strove to fully account for himself in his lifetime. In all that he pursued, he gave everything until it quite literally hurt. This was the man. Yes, he was very unusual. He did almost everything contrary to what people asked, and contrary to what was acceptable in his time. A 'Mad Genius'? You decide. He saw beauty where others saw none. He drew and painted some of the most moving and wondrous works of art in history. His letters shine with exceptional vision and insight. This book covers everything, and spares the reader nothing. There is no happy ending here. So, be forewarned to enter at your own peril. But, perhaps like me, you'll walk away stunned by the greatness of this man, and you'll learn from his tenacity in the face of adversity, and be thankful that he existed to create such haunting original beauty.

It is, by far, the best biography of Vincent van Gogh. If you really are interested in both, the artwork and "the man behind the canvas", you have to read this book. The authors did a great job. It's easy to follow and the website with the notes is such a nice help. If they would have included them in the book, it would be too heavy. So, it was a good decision to create a website with the notes. Of course, the best way to know Vincent is his letters. But, I mean, this book is the BEST second way. And, thanks to VG: The Life I have understood his work, life and letters much better.

Have never been schooled in art history but wanted to tackle this read because the art of Vincent

Van Gogh always moves me. I wanted to understand more about him and why he painted the way he did and how he chose some of his famous subjects. It's all here and then some. At times I felt I was given too much information about his life but the writers were probably aiming towards a more learned reader than I am. Still, I read every word and learned so much. One reason I was able to stay with it: the narrative drive and the writing are so good! A couple of times I was moved to tears.

A magical scholarly work of epic scope. Not only are you learning about Vincent but also the world around him. Historical context is so important when learning about a figure from the past. It's what bad biographies lack: the place and times of that particular individual. I have read many books about Van Gogh including his letters and it is a joy to learn so much more and in such a well written way. Simply excellent. And I'm only on page 127! And don't forget about the book's website created by the authors with an additional 6000 pages of notes!! Get it. And get a used hardcover. I did. It's beautiful and only cost 10\$ (including shipping) Boom

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