

Van gogh's 'starry night': analysis



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1. Introduction

“Starry Night” is one of the most popular canvases in modern-day philosophy along with being one of the most simulated and pursued after images. This painting was done by Vincent van Gogh when he was at an asylum in Saint-Remy in 1889. It is said that this painting is a view out of Van Gogh’s asylum window. The painting shows swirling clouds in a starry night and a bright crescent moon, overlooking perhaps a village. This shows a contrast between the bright night sky and the silence of the village which is supposed to be Van Gogh’s hometown Netherland. The painting also consists of a cypress tree which is typically found in graveyards. This might have something to do with the artist’s perception of the inevitability of death and how close it is on Earth. Starry Night is just one example of Vincent Van Gogh’s numerous painting which show night life, from which it can be presumed that the artist loved night time. Vincent van Gogh’s art is generally observed by critics as “Early Post-Impressionism.” The artist was inspired by the innovative ideas of Paul Gauguin and Camille Pissarro, and wanted to bring out something innovative of his own because their works were being called repetitive and limiting.

In his asylum, Vincent van Gogh was not allowed to paint in his room on the second floor. He was given a separate room and some charcoal and paper on which he used to do his work and then improve it later. Van Gogh used to write about his painting to his brother however, there does not exist a particular reason for the creation of this painting as the artist only wrote about Starry Nights twice. A letter to his brother contained the following words:

“ This morning I saw the country from my window a long time before sunrise, with nothing but the morning star, which looked very big,”

This is a very vague statement regarding the painting, hence the reason for its creation remains unknown.

I, as a night lover myself, feel very strongly about the painting Starry Nights. The imagery of clouds painted in a swirling motion create a magnificent affect and brings out the beauty of the night which can only be seen from the eyes of a true lover of night time. I am particularly impressed by the unique use of colors in the painting. Which most people’s perception of the color of stars would be white, Van Gogh has painted them a bright yellow, and yet they appear to be a beautiful shining sight.

2. Body

Vincent van Gogh was going through a serious medical condition at the time he painted Starry Nights. This might be one of the reasons why his brush strokes are very thick and prominent in the painting, which give a sever sense of drama in the painting. His brush strokes have an unrelenting rhythm, which creates the illusion of the image being in motion. Moreover there is a certain consistency in his procedure that adds extra depth to the work.

The most prominent shapes in the painting are of the circular motion in which the stars and the clouds are portrayed. Normally, clouds are never given the shape of circles in painting but in Starry Nights, Van Gogh has shown them as swirling clouds forming a perfect circle and appear to be in

motion. The stars are also painted in a circular form, rather than the typical pointed star form. This results in the painting looking consistent as the stars and the clouds are both circular shapes.

The main sources of light in the picture are the luminous stars and the hemispherical moon. It is evident that the artist had a passion for night life, as the painting shows a silent village resting underneath a dominant sky. All the light sources are present in the sky as compared to in the village at the bottom.

The darkness is reflected in the village at the bottom half of the painting. It represents how gloomy the world looks as compared to the bright night sky. Moreover the cypress tree is also a dark figure in the painting. As cypress trees are mostly found in cemeteries, this element of the painting is meant to show a connection between life and death and how close they are. Hence this is one of the darker elements of the painting.

In Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Nights*, there is a dominance of the color blue which is visible in the sky as well as in the village shown in the bottom of the picture. The artist's strange use of colors is sometimes associated with his medical condition, perhaps he might have been a patient of lead poisoning or a kind of brain disease. Van Gogh's use of yellow and white to represent the stars draws the viewer's attention to the sky. Perpendicular lines for example the cypress tree and church tower gently disintegrate the structure without withdrawing from the influential nighttime atmosphere illustrated in *Starry Night*. The reflection of the moon is shown by streaks of dark blue and greens, complemented with a touch of mint green. The houses of the village

in the painting are small blocks of greens, oranges and yellows with a hint of red towards the left of the church. The bright blue colors of the sky are carefully balanced by the orange of some of the elements of the night sky. The rich colors used in *Starry Nights* are used to portray emotions and show the real love of night time of Van Gogh.

Starry Nights was created in June 1889. It is made on a canvas of height 73. 7 cm and length 92. 10 cm. Oil paints have been used for this painting. *Starry Nights* can be characterized as a landscape painting as its main focus is the natural element the sky. This oil painting is framed and is currently owned by and displayed in New York in the Museum of Modern Art.

One of the various interpretations of *Starry Nights* by Van Gogh is that it is a depiction of hope. Van Gogh has shown that even in such a dark night, the sky is illuminated by the bright shining stars, which can be seen as a ray of hope from the silent village underneath. The sky is filled with shining stars that show that even in complete darkness, there is a light to guide you. Van Gogh had been severely sick at the time he made this painting. We can assume from his work that he was at last being treated of his sickness and he saw a hope of a new life, which he so masterfully illustrated in his painting. Also, the cypress tree shows that he knows death is inevitable but when it does come, it will give him eternal peace.

Van Gogh mentioned the painting to his brother in a letter, in the following words:

*“ I should not be surprised if you liked the *Starry Night* and the *Ploughed Fields*, there is a greater quiet about them than in the other canvases.”*

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Later in the same letter, Vincent van Gogh referred to a book by Leo Tolstoy “ My Religion” and talked about its lack of belief in resurrection. This shows how Van Gogh was at war with himself regarding the topic; he could neither accept that death was coming, nor was he able to completely forget about it. Concluding, it can be said that the night sky made him feel at peace with himself and calmed his heart. (Artble, 2014)

Conclusion:

It can be concluded from the analysis that Vincent van Gogh was a nighttime lover and saw the inner beauty in the night sky which people usually overlook. He has communicated from the painting that night time is not just about darkness; it can sometimes be so illuminating and can contain a ray of hope which leaves the worldly things looking dark and dull in its comparison. The painting also contains a link between life and death which is present there due to the artist's ill health and his knowledge about death being inevitable. Though he was not looking forward to it, he had accepted the idea that death might be coming soon and he would eventually have to come to terms with it.

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com/artists/vincent_van_gogh/paintings/starry_night/more_information/
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