

Student's First and Last Name

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Discipline

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Visual Analysis

Vincent Van Gogh's *The Bedroom in Arles*

The original tormented artist, the one that gave a beginning to a concept of the inseparability of art and madness, Vincent Van Gogh was famous for his distinct swirling oil work, daring brush strokes, and many bold colors. *The Bedroom in Arles*, or simply *The Bedroom*, as Van Gogh himself would call it, is a series of paintings that depict the artist's bedroom in the Yellow House in Arles, where Van Gogh lived during the short period of 1888-1889. The Yellow House was an incredibly precious, though short-lived, place for Vincent. When first arriving in Arles, Van Gogh was remarkably particular about his vision of home - the first place where he stayed did not fit his standards, the second one was too expensive for him, still relying financially on his brother. His third attempt resulted in renting the fateful Yellow House. The building was run-down and completely unfurnished, but all the more treasured by the artist who was fond of the house's gaucherie and the rurality of Arles. Van Gogh's artistic self was incredibly fruitful in the Yellow House - inspired by the rural beauty of Arles, he painted over one hundred paintings here. *The Bedroom in Arles* was one of his personal favorites - in the correspondence to his brother, Theo; he described it in thirteen different letters. As a whole,

Vincent's short time in Arles can be described as one of the happiest and most contented periods of his life. Due to this, *The Bedroom in Arles* in all its simplicity could be considered the embodiment of Van Gogh's cherished memories and emotions together with an eternal rest that he experienced in Arles.

Firstly, it is important to focus on the painting's scale - it is moderately large, size-thirty, a format that was strongly favored by the artist. The unique, warped perspective is probably the first of many striking things about this painting. Despite it being based on the actual existing artist's bedroom, the bounds of the room seem unrealistic. At first glance, you could even say someone lacking skill drew it. The left far corner of the room is slightly angled towards the front, creating an odd, rectangular shape of the bedroom. This was not necessarily because of Van Gogh's whim - the structure of the bedroom was originally this way, with its slanted outer wall, adding to the oddness of the painting as a whole. Because of such perspective, the objects seem to be placed quite haphazardly, as though sliding down towards the foreground. Two chairs are tilted in an especially unrealistic way, in which the viewer can see the seat of the chair, which would not be possible if Van Gogh drew it more realistically. The paintings on the wall also appear to be falling, creating a sense of movement in an otherwise still painting. The painting seems to be stuck in between two-dimensional and three-dimensional spaces because of the absence of shadows, crooked geometry of the room and flat colors. With all these features, in addition using humble surroundings as his subjects, Van Gogh seems to have taken inspiration from Japanese woodcuts, by whose painters he was intrigued. The painter used broad straight lines to emphasize the sturdiness and stillness of the furniture and added slightly uneven lines on the doors and the window. With this pattern, he supported the simplicity of subject matter

without overloading it with complicated lines and techniques that he, undoubtedly, still excelled at.

The colors are the focal point of *The Bedroom*; they deliver the tranquility of the place. In the letter to Theo, Vincent says about *The Bedroom*: "Here, color is to do everything". Van Gogh uses bright, bold colors, uncharacteristic for that time, but familiar to him. The pale blue of the walls, yellow undertones of the chairs, bed rest, the frames of the paintings, details of green in the window shutters, the deep red of the bed cover altogether creates a collaboration of colors that greatly compensate for the shortness of its perspective. Accentuating the calmness and stability of the painting, Van Gogh pays homage to the color theory by using the primitive blue, red and yellow. Each element of the picture is expressive on its own, tying the picture together and creating a harmonious composition.

The Yellow House became for Van Gogh a place of greatest hopes and ambitions together with his most horrific crises. For him, it was more than just a place to stay; it was a foundation for his far greater dreams. Van Gogh's desire was to create an art studio, a haven of sorts for like-minded painters, where they could work together and encourage each other on their craft - a so-called art colony "Studio of the South". Moreover, the Yellow House served as a first step to achieving this goal. His dream of an artistic brotherhood started coming to life with Paul Gauguin agreeing to live with Van Gogh for an artistic partnership. This arrangement marked the start of the end of the artist's life in Arles. His friendship with Gauguin started to shatter; Vincent's mental state played a huge role in their split. However, Van Gogh drew *The Bedroom* in an ecstatic period of preparation and hope for new future achievements and captured the feelings of rest and calmness that he experienced.

One telling thing from this painting about the artist's personality is the breakthrough from the standards of art. Van Gogh explored the limits of art, unafraid of its bounds and principals. The unusual perspective of his room did not bother him; instead, he used it to his advantage rather well. The Dutch painters of his time feared of bold colors; contrary to them, Vincent rebelled against this tradition by using rather bold tones of primitive colors. In the letter to Theo, Vincent mentioned that *The Bedroom* is supposed to "rest your mind or rather the imagination". Despite this intent, the art piece is bustling with energy and movement, which is incredibly telling of Vincent's state of mind. His idea of rest differed from the traditional one - even such ordinary objects like bed and curtains were charged with energy, as though restless from the stillness that he tried to instill. The painting helped Van Gogh to ease his mind: when stuck in an asylum, after the unfortunate fight with Paul Gauguin, he recreated it five different times in a form of sketches and oil artwork. When he came back from the asylum, he was especially glad to see *The Bedroom*: "When I saw my canvases again after my illness, what seemed to me the best was *The Bedroom*", he wrote. The painting captures what was most dear to Van Gogh throughout his life – rest, simplicity and calmness.

In conclusion, the calmness and rest as a subject matter are not common in most Van Gogh's works. *The Bedroom* manages to compensate for it, showing a different side of the artist. Van Gogh treasured his time at the Yellow House dearly and had his own image of the perfect rest. The room, filled with oddities and details that in no way would be resembled to rest, gives an impression of who Van Gogh was as a person and what he meant by tranquility. Though *The Bedroom* does not calm down our imaginations, still leaving us wondering about its author, it healed definitely in a sense healed his own creator by his favorite medicine – art.

Appendix

Vincent Van Gogh. *The Bedroom in Arles*. 1888

Oil on canvas, 72.4 cm x 91.3 cm

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

