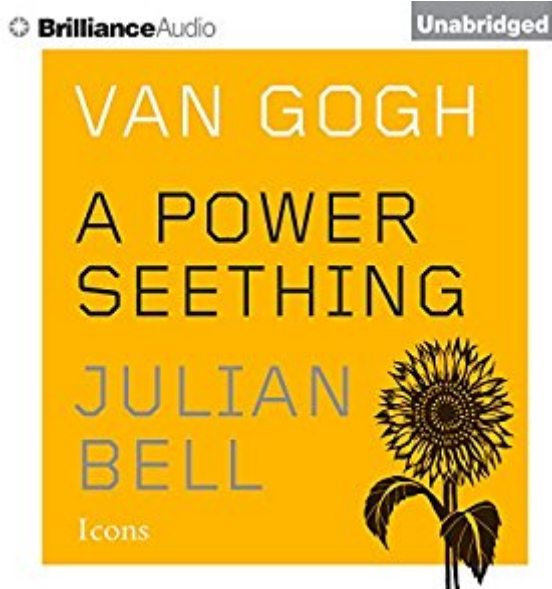


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Van Gogh: A Power Seething: Icons



Synopsis

A passionate account of the tortured life and tragic death of the greatest artist of the nineteenth century, by renowned critic and painter Julian Bell. *Van Gogh* is a vivid portrait of the great Impressionist painter that traces his life from the Netherlands, where he was born into a family of art dealers, through his years in England, the Hague, and Paris, to his final home in Arles, where he discovered the luminous style of his late paintings before his suicide at the age of thirty-seven. Van Gogh struggled to find his way as an artist: Well into his mid-twenties he had achieved virtually nothing except a few charcoal drawings of coal miners. Afflicted by mental illness and a mercurial temper, he was institutionalized several times toward the end of his life. Julian Bell conveys this tragic story with great compassion, depicting van Gogh in all his anguished vigor, a genius for whom the greatest challenge was to stay alive until he had completed his most fully realized and magnificent works.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Julian Bell is a painter who has penned *Van Gogh: A Power Seething*, and because of that background, it's a slightly different take on a biography. Bell discusses a lot of Van Gogh's attitudes towards painting, including the shift between reality and imaginative painting, and discusses how Van Gogh had such a strong fascination with the bold and intense colors that characterize many of his famous works. The understanding of color play and the emotional integration of them are some of the most memorable moments from this book. It's a relatively short tome - by no means a

comprehensive look at Van Gogh's life - but hits the highlights (and lowlights) of his life. Bell discusses Van Gogh's temperament (bi-polar), passion for prostitutes (and contraction of several STDs like syphilis and gonorrhea that may have helped hasten his death via mental illness) so it reads as a mostly fair treatment of the artist, with little bias. Included are some excerpts of letters to his brother, Theo, which express his frustration, rage, and inability to financially support himself. The one improvement would be to have a reproduction of the pieces that Bell mentions in the book. Besides the famous Van Gogh paintings that almost everyone knows, Bell discusses other, much lesser known ones, and it would have been nice to have those integrated into the text (or even listed in an appendix) rather than having to turn to another source to see what that paintings looked like. There is a [vangoghgallery](http://vangoghgallery.com) website that lists the comprehensive works, and may be useful to other readers. Recommended for readers who want to know highlights of Van Gogh's life.

The writing style of this is addictive- it's fluid, like some beautiful hybrid of a story, a biography, and a painting. I know it's probably cliché to suggest that a book about a painter is like reading a painting, but it really feels that way, like each sentence is a brush stroke: complete in isolation and leading the eye to the next sentence paragraph, page. If you are a lover of Van Gogh's work but aren't already aware of his tortured history, erratic behavior, and generally disturbed life, brace yourself. Like Mozart and many other geniuses before him, Van Gogh was extremely problematic, and had a short, difficult, and strained life, complete with frequent violent outbursts and creepy behavior. Reading about his childhood was new for me; it's obvious that many of the traits that made him such a gifted artist also contributed to him being a very troubled and problematic youth, with loving parents doing their best to help him but without modern technologies and medications. Reading this was actively a pleasure. It wasn't just pleasurable for the information, but the presentation as well. Just as I have stood in museums staring for hours at the same painting of an almond branch, at multiple points in my life, I think I will come back to this book and give it another read in time, because it's a heart-pulling and impassioned view of a heart-pulling and impassioned artist. It might not be everybody's flavor of writing style so I suggest reading a sample first, but if you're a Van Gogh fan it's a must-read.

I can add very little to the excellent reviews which have already been written. I have been a Van Gogh "fan" (of the artist NOT the man) for many years, ever since since I read the majority of the collection of his letters to Theo. (Interesting that it was Jo who realized the import of those letters.) It was those letters that actually introduced me to many of the artists to whom he refers. We have

subsequently visited many of the locations in which he stayed and from which he painted. I regret that I did not come across this writing before visiting those places. (e.g. Bell's description of the bars on the windows of his room in the asylum being similar to Vincent's old perspective frame, devoid of horizontal stabilizers, is particularly something I wish I had known before visiting but something which has added an entirely new perspective to my understanding of those later works.) There is no doubt that Mr. Bell's being a painter adds a different, invaluable perspective and does tend to make many of the paintings even more poignant....if that's possible. I agree with one reviewer's comment in that I wish more were known about Theo. One negative comment. It would have been helpful to have photos of the works discussed. However as I was checking out "L'allee des Alyscamps" I fell upon the fact that it had just (May, 2015) sold in NY for \$66.3 million which they say, adjusted to today's dollars would be about \$153 million. The first owners listed in the Provenance of the painting were Marie and Joseph Ginoux, Arles.

Didn't agree with the reviews--language is sometimes difficult--and had trouble getting into it. But about half way through it evens out and you get an excellent history of this artist, the challenges of his time and his illness, and the development of his style over his lifetime. Be sure to read *Imagine Me Gone* when you finish this one!

Having read the definitive Naifeh-Smith biography of Van Gogh when it appeared a few years back, I was surprised to see this small book on the market. What more could there be to say about Vincent's tormented life and artistic genius? It turns out that Julian Bell, himself a painter, has given us something new and surprising: an imaginative interior view of Van Gogh's life. The familiar exterior of a ham-handed, frenetic social misfit lurching to astonishing results, is transformed into a whole-souled struggle to produce canvas equivalents for an otherwise inexpressible empathy. Bell produces this result mainly by close and sympathetic readings of Van Gogh's letters and work, and in the end convinces me of Vincent's joy and delight in his art, and of his determined struggle against madness.

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