

March Column, OPAA ArtWalks, 2021 Suzan Noyes

“We’re all pilgrims on the same journey - but some pilgrims have better road maps.”

Nelson DeMille

We adjust to obstacles in our artistic journeys, which may require a simple response or a severe change of venue in all aspects of our lives.

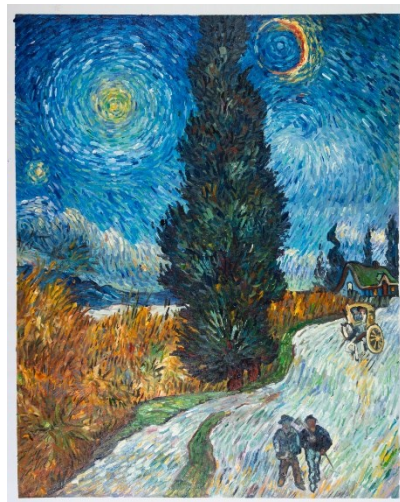
How many times have I kicked off the new year with a vow to concentrate on art and not get sidetracked? I *have* painted along the way, just not as much as if I had only done this. The pandemic hasn’t helped. I end up feeling guilty, untrue to myself and my goals. Other artists agree it is difficult staying motivated.

February’s column spotlighted the concept of ‘journey’, reminding me that zig-zags on the path are learning curves and growth is good. Usually.

This month I offer two journeys of amazing artists:

Vincent Van Gogh, whose works are among the world’s most expensive paintings ever sold. This painter never garnered much of a living or heard much applause. Wouldn’t he be amazed at his notoriety now?

Born to a Dutch upper-middle-class family both strict and religious, Vincent suffered depression and ill-health for most of his life. Now-famous correspondence between Vincent and close brother Theo documents much of a determined soul in quest of a purpose. For several years Vincent made



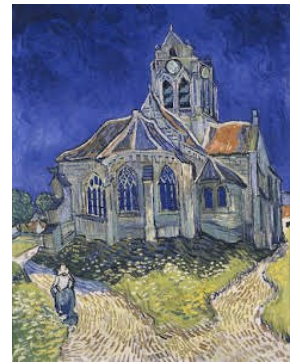
a commitment to missionary work but his efforts frustrated him.

He put it aside, taking up painting in 1881. Early drawings of still life and peasants were strong but subdued. He was fortunate to have Theo’s continued support and introductions to Parisian artists. Vincent was attracted to Neo-Impressionists. I wonder what they thought of him, argumentative and self-destructive, buying paints and canvas over food. Poverty, breakdowns repeatedly drove him back to his family, who did not see an artistic genius, but a loser and problem child. His drinking and ill-chosen, brief romantic relationships aggravated

Vincent’s mental stability further, while creating the most original and memorable paintings of

his life in the south of France. Bright, vibrant, pulsating canvasses that kept Vincent going until they didn't.

He shot himself at thirty-seven. During his life, he sold one painting. We know he gave many away. At his death there were over 900 paintings. Where did Theo keep them all? Where did they go?



When I feel blocked with my art, I remind myself of Vincent's journey – he kept painting despite all. I was lucky to see his painting of iris on loan at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Vincent Van Gogh, Wikipedia

Enjoy this Art Walk: [Van Gogh Museum 4K Virtual Tour \(or Van Gogh Museum -YouTube\)](#)

From depths to the heights:

Many are unfamiliar with nineteenth century artist **Rosa Bonheur**. She was not reviewed in my art history classes, though we covered many French artists and various styles. I must have seen Rosa's realistic 16' x 8' painting, *The Horse Fair* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City when I was young. I



have the **Smithsonian Magazine** to thank for prompting my memory and sharing her journey.

Her father was a struggling art teacher and painter who moved his wife and four children to Paris, then left them to join a utopian movement. Her mother struggled to support her four



children with music lessons and sewing but soon died. This left a permanent mark.

“Rosa Bonheur vowed she would never marry and have children – a promise she kept.” *Elaine Sciolino*

She reconnected with her father long enough to continue her artistic training; Rosa preferred drawing animals from early on. She copied paintings in the Louvre, learning to paint animals in motion with “photographic precision”. At nineteen, she exhibited two paintings at the Paris Salon. In 1848, she won a special prize from the committee (Said committee included Delacroix, Ingres and Corot, what a coup!). Soon after, she received a state commission, later revealed at the Paris Salon, of two teams of oxen with heavy plows – one critic called it “a masterpiece”. Another stated the painting showed “much more vigor...than you normally find in the hand of a woman.” *The Horse Fair*, 16’ x 8’ painted in 1855, made her reputation and netted Rosa a Belgian art dealer who purchased it and took her on as a client.



(I wonder in what atelier she painted a canvas this size and how it was transported across Paris for the show?) Having made her name at a young age, Rosa purchased a chateau where she kept dozens of species of animals, including lions and tigers. She also studied animals in all-male settings like animal fairs, swapping dresses for a special cross-dressing permit from the Paris police. (Did George Sand need a permit as well?)



Rosa Bonheur said “I wed art, it is my husband – my world – my life dream – the air I breathe...” She passed away in 1899. By then her paintings were falling out of style. Her companion inherited the estate and struggled to keep it going. It has now been recently purchased by Katherine Brault with the idea of a cultural tourism business. The pandemic has slowed this goal, but Rosa Bonheur’s artistic legacy sees rebirth in the near future.

The Redemption of Rosa Bonheur by Elaine Sciolino – Smithsonian Magazine, Nov. 2020

Hope is the human condition.

Van Gogh paintings: Self Portrait with Grey Fedora, Road with Cypress, Church at Auvers, Iris.

Rosa Bonheur paintings: The Horse Fair, Study of a Cow, Col. William F. Cody, *Portrait of Rosa Bonheur* 1857- Edouard Louis Dubufe.