

Q & A - 50 Years of the Van Gogh Museum

What can be found in the Van Gogh Museum collection?

When Vincent van Gogh decided to become an artist in 1880, he was supported by his brother Theo. It was agreed that in exchange for the financial assistance, Theo could keep the artworks that Vincent made. The brothers also put together their own art collection of works by contemporaries. With some 200 paintings, 500 drawings, 30 prints and more than 800 letters, now owned by the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, the Van Gogh Museum is home to the world's largest collection of works by Vincent van Gogh. In addition to about 225 paintings, drawings and prints by contemporaries, the core collection also includes more than 600 Japanese prints and more than 2,000 reproduction prints and magazine illustrations. The now world-famous collection is tangible proof of the close connection between the brothers – and best friends – Vincent and Theo.

How many directors has the museum had?

The museum has had a number of different directors over the years. The first director was Emile R. Meijer, who held the position from the opening of the museum until February 1976. He was succeeded by Marius van Hoogstraten, who was acting director from February 1976 until the first half of 1977. Gijs Heuff assumed the position of acting director from June 1977 until March 1978. In the second half of 1977, Simon H. Levie was appointed as the new director, and remained in office until September 1983. Johannes van der Wolk was the next director, from April 1978 until January 1984.

The museum had two acting directors in 1984 and 1985: Cornelis Willem van Cappellen from March 1984 until December 1984, and Charles E. van Blommestein from January 1985 until December 1985. Ronald de Leeuw was the director of the museum from January 1986 until December 1996. John Leighton was the next director of the Van Gogh Museum, from March 1997 until March 2006. Axel Rüger succeeded him, heading the museum from March 2006 until April 2019. Adriaan Dönszelmann was acting director between April 2019 and February 2020. And since February 2020, Emilie Gordenker has been the director of the museum.

What are the most important discoveries made by the Van Gogh Museum in the past 50 years?

The Van Gogh Museum conducts a great deal of research into the life and work of Vincent van Gogh and the art of his time. As a leading research institute, the museum plays a crucial role in the authentication and discovery of (new) work by Vincent van Gogh. Over the years, the museum has received and answered a total

of some 5,500 authentication requests. This resulted in the confirmation of ten works by Van Gogh, including three paintings.

The most significant discovery was in 2013. On 9 September 2013, the museum announced a newly confirmed painting by Vincent van Gogh: *Sunset at Montmajour* (1888). This painting had never before been publicly exhibited, and was attributed to Van Gogh following years of research. A letter that Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo confirmed the authenticity of the work: 'Yesterday, at sunset, I was on a stony heath where very small, twisted oaks grow, in the background a ruin on the hill, and wheatfields in the valley. It was romantic, it couldn't be more so, à la Monticelli, the sun was pouring its very yellow rays over the bushes and the ground, absolutely a shower of gold'.

How many visitors have been to the museum since it opened in 1973?

Since the museum opened in 1973, the annual visitor numbers have gradually increased. While 345,590 visitors came to the museum in 1973, attendance was up to 2.6 million visitors in the record year of 2017. The busiest week ever was week 30 of 2017, when 57,351 visitors came to the museum. And on the busiest day, 4 November 2017, the museum welcomed 13,306 visitors. The number of Dutch visitors has almost doubled in the past decade, representing faster growth than the 50% growth in total visitor numbers.

Following the coronavirus pandemic, visitor numbers have not returned to the peaks of 2017. This was intentional. In 2017, the museum introduced a booking system for tickets. The museum believes that a high-quality museum experience and reaching different target groups is more important than visitor numbers rising year-on-year. On 2 June 2023, 53 million visitors will have come to the museum since it opened in 1973.

Which international celebrities have visited the museum?

In addition to countless visitors, the museum has also welcomed many celebrities and heads of state during the past 50 years. These include distinguished names including Barack and Michelle Obama, The Rolling Stones, Bill Clinton, Brad Pitt, Shakira, Channing Tatum, Tim Cook, Madonna, George Clooney, David Cameron, Dwayne Johnson, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Leonardo DiCaprio, Barbra Streisand, Adele, Olivia Rodrigo, Justin Bieber, One Direction and many others.

Which acts have performed at the Van Gogh Museum?

The Van Gogh Museum has attracted art lovers and famous names, and has also invited prominent entertainers to take to the stage. In 2019, Don McLean gave [a heart-warming rendition of Vincent \(Starry, Starry Night\) in the museum](#), and in 2005, Patti Smith brought her unique talents to the *Vincent on Friday* stage.

The museum has also offered a platform for many leading young Dutch artists early in their careers. Acts including Sevdaliza, Eefje de Visser, Goldband, Typhoon, Naaz, S10, Mozes and the Firstborn, Yung Nnelg, Willem, De Staat, Stippenlift, Glen Faria, Jayh, Zwart Licht, Ray Fuego, Sef and Jungle by Night have performed at the museum.

What question is most frequently asked by visitors?

'Where can I see *Starry Night*?' is the most frequently asked question by visitors to the Van Gogh Museum. However, *Starry Night* is not in the museum's collection. The world-famous work can be found at the MoMA in New York. The painting was briefly on display in Amsterdam during a major retrospective in 1990: *Starry Night* was exhibited at the museum for three months, and proved to be highly popular with visitors.