

VINCENT VAN GOGH

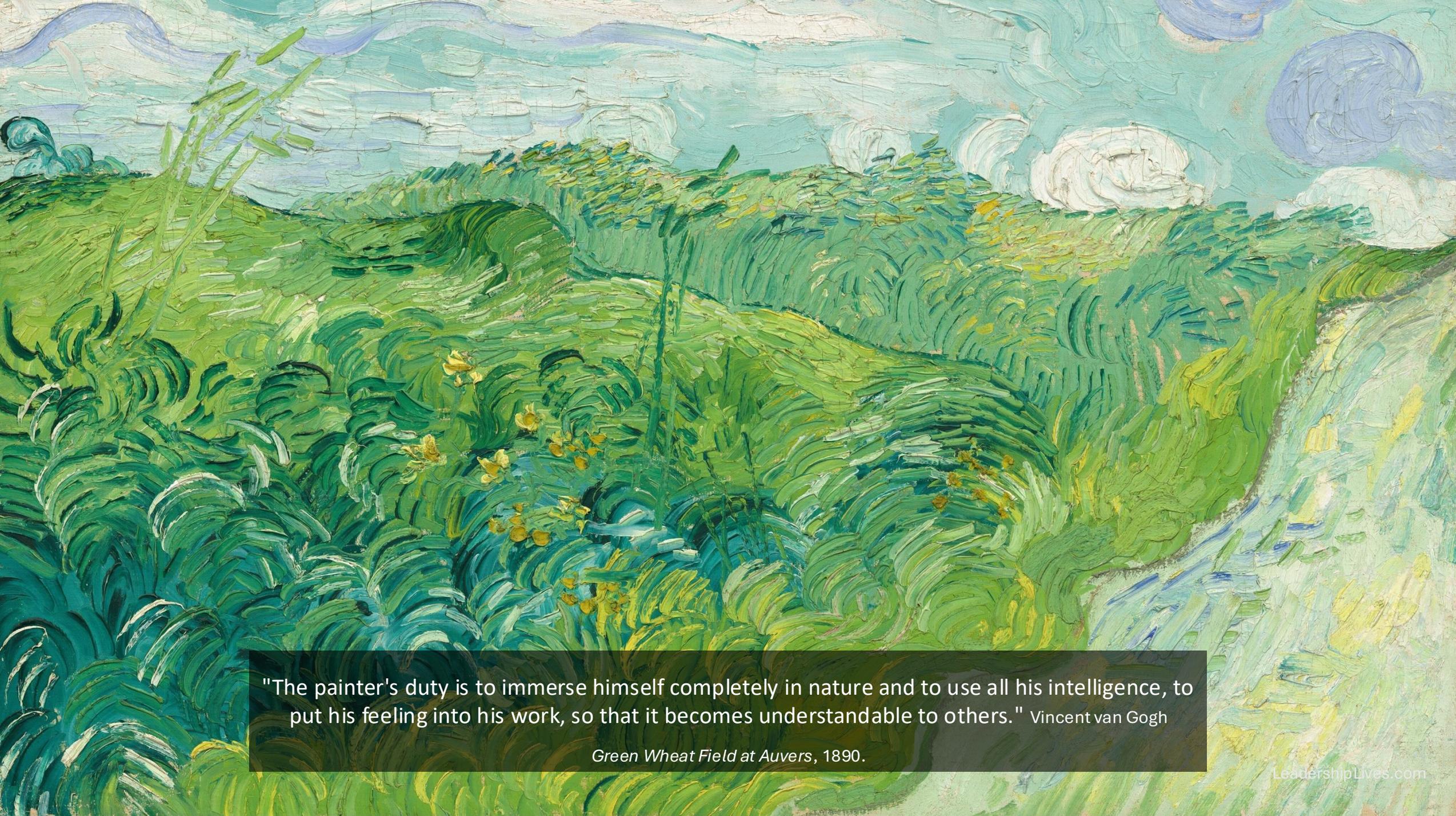
NATURE UNLEASHED

MARGOT MORRELL
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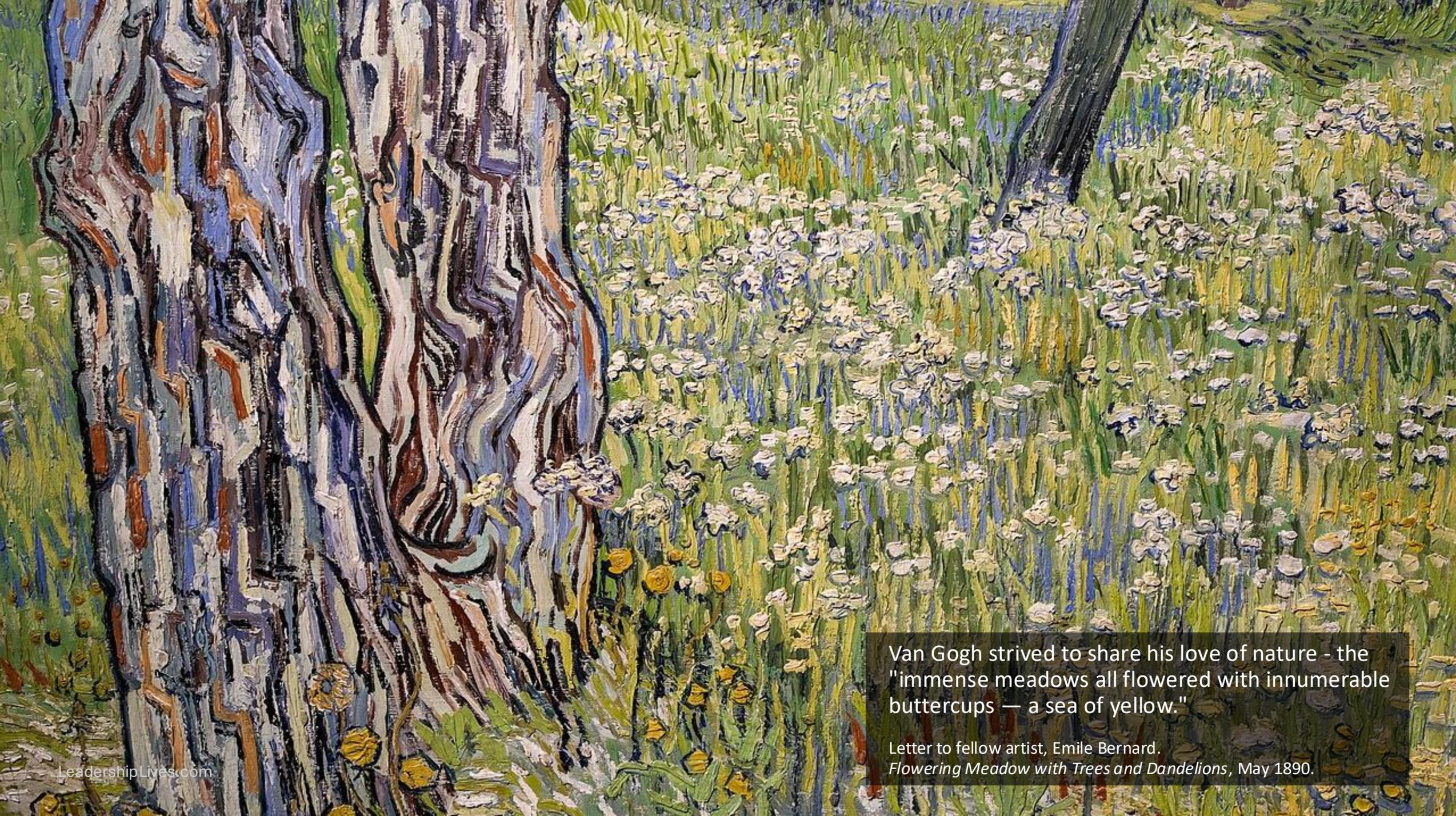
This photo-essay is a bouquet for my sister, Alison, with gratitude for many helpful suggestions over the years.

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Proverbs 17:17



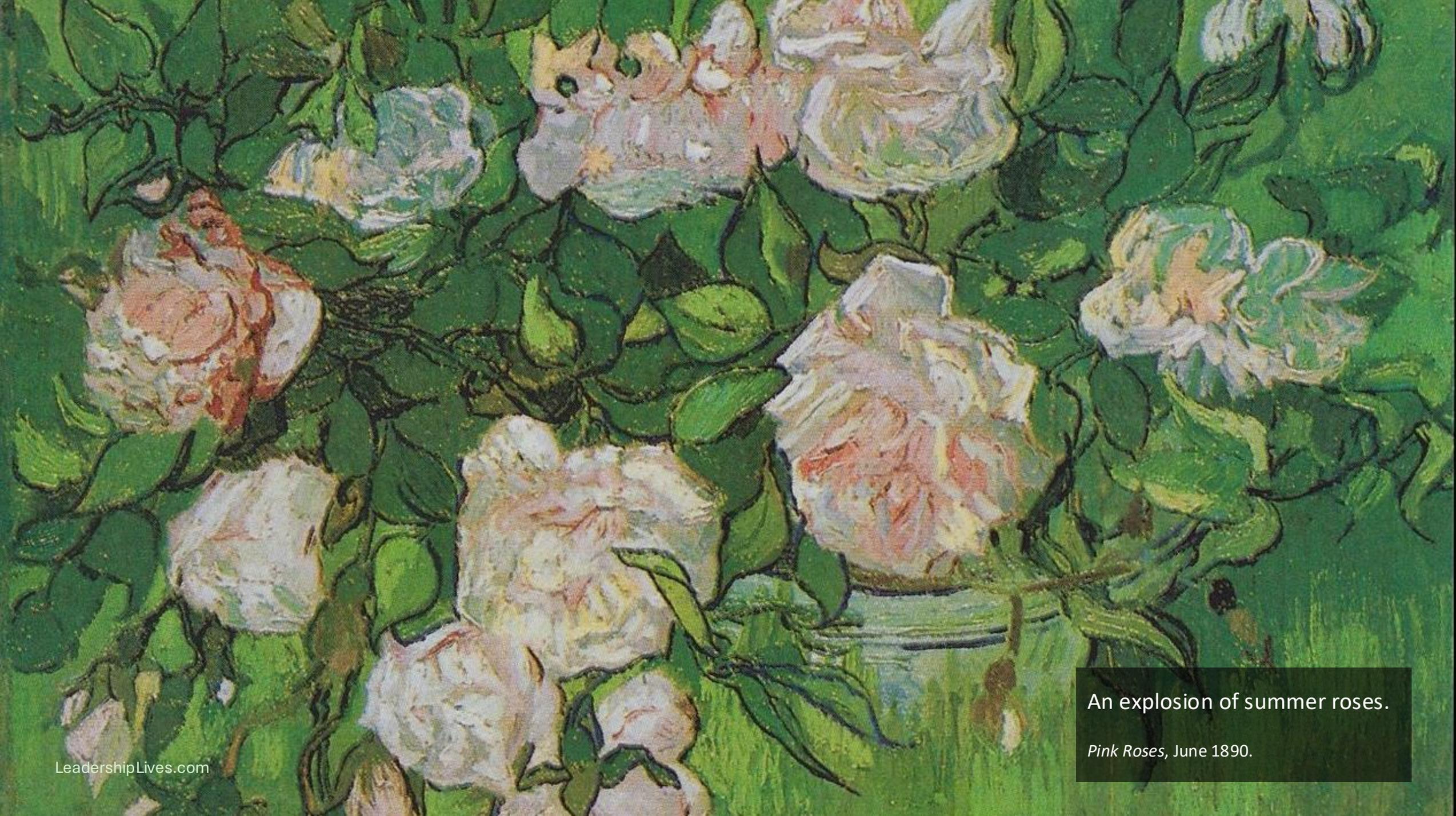
"The painter's duty is to immerse himself completely in nature and to use all his intelligence, to put his feeling into his work, so that it becomes understandable to others." Vincent van Gogh

Green Wheat Field at Auvers, 1890.



Van Gogh strived to share his love of nature - the "immense meadows all flowered with innumerable buttercups — a sea of yellow."

Letter to fellow artist, Emile Bernard.
Flowering Meadow with Trees and Dandelions, May 1890.



An explosion of summer roses.
Pink Roses, June 1890.



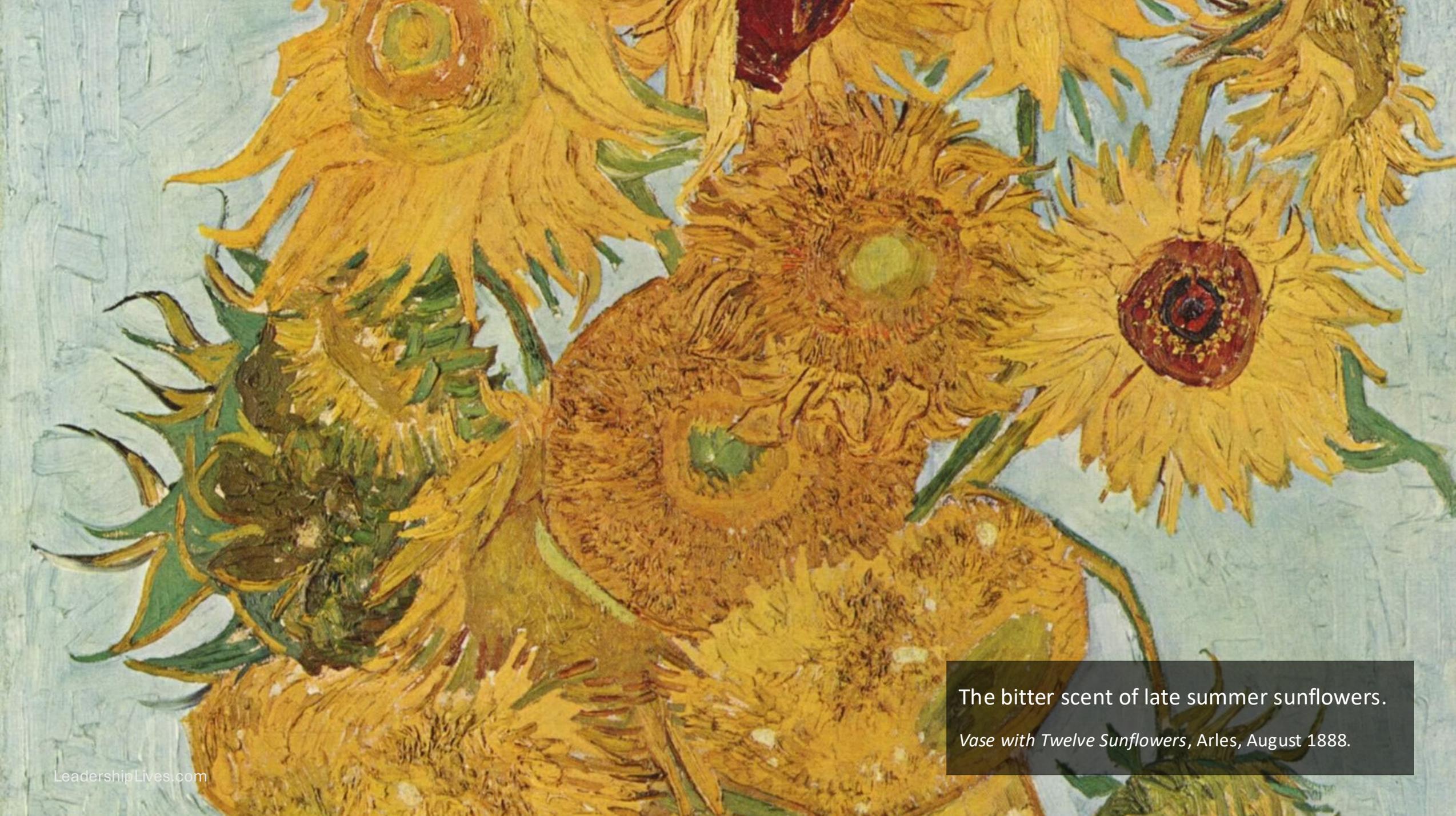
An impending storm.

Wheatfield Under Thunderclouds,
Auvers-sur-Oise, July 1890.



A north wind rushing through an olive orchard.

Olive Orchard, Saint Remy, June 1889.



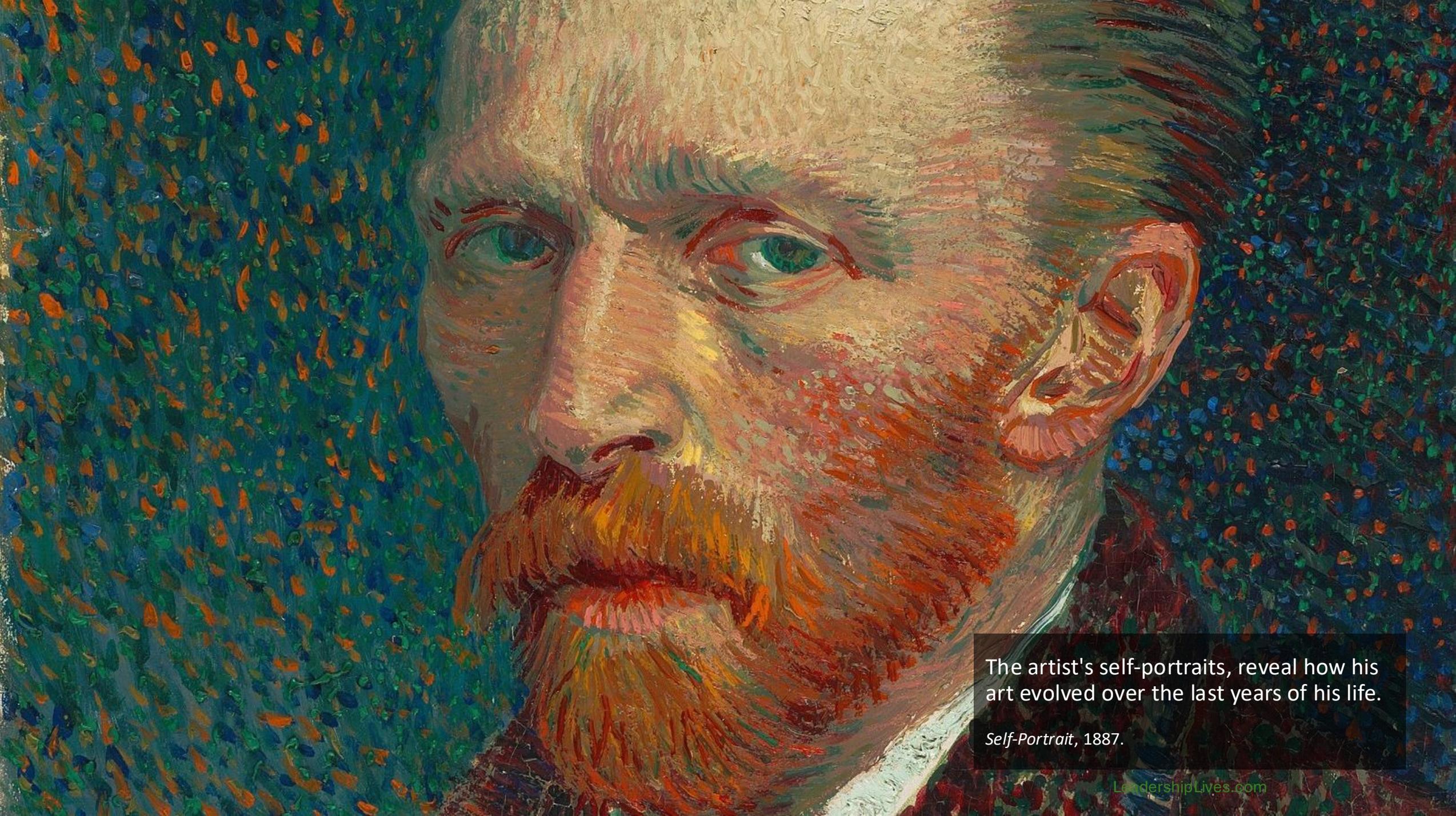
The bitter scent of late summer sunflowers.

Vase with Twelve Sunflowers, Arles, August 1888.



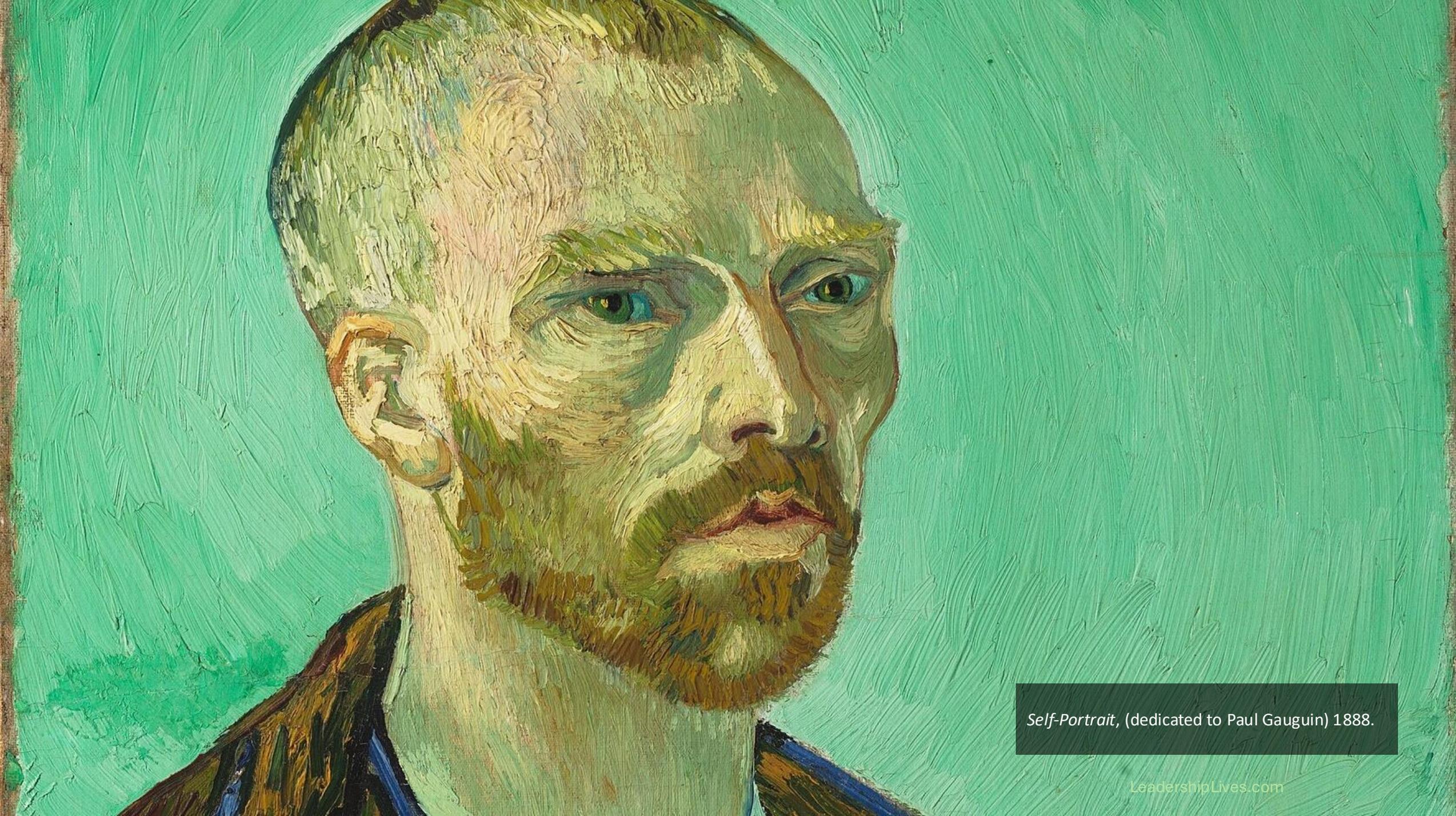
"Sooner, or later, a love of Nature always meets with a response from people interested in Art."

Letter to Theo.
Starry Night, June 1889.

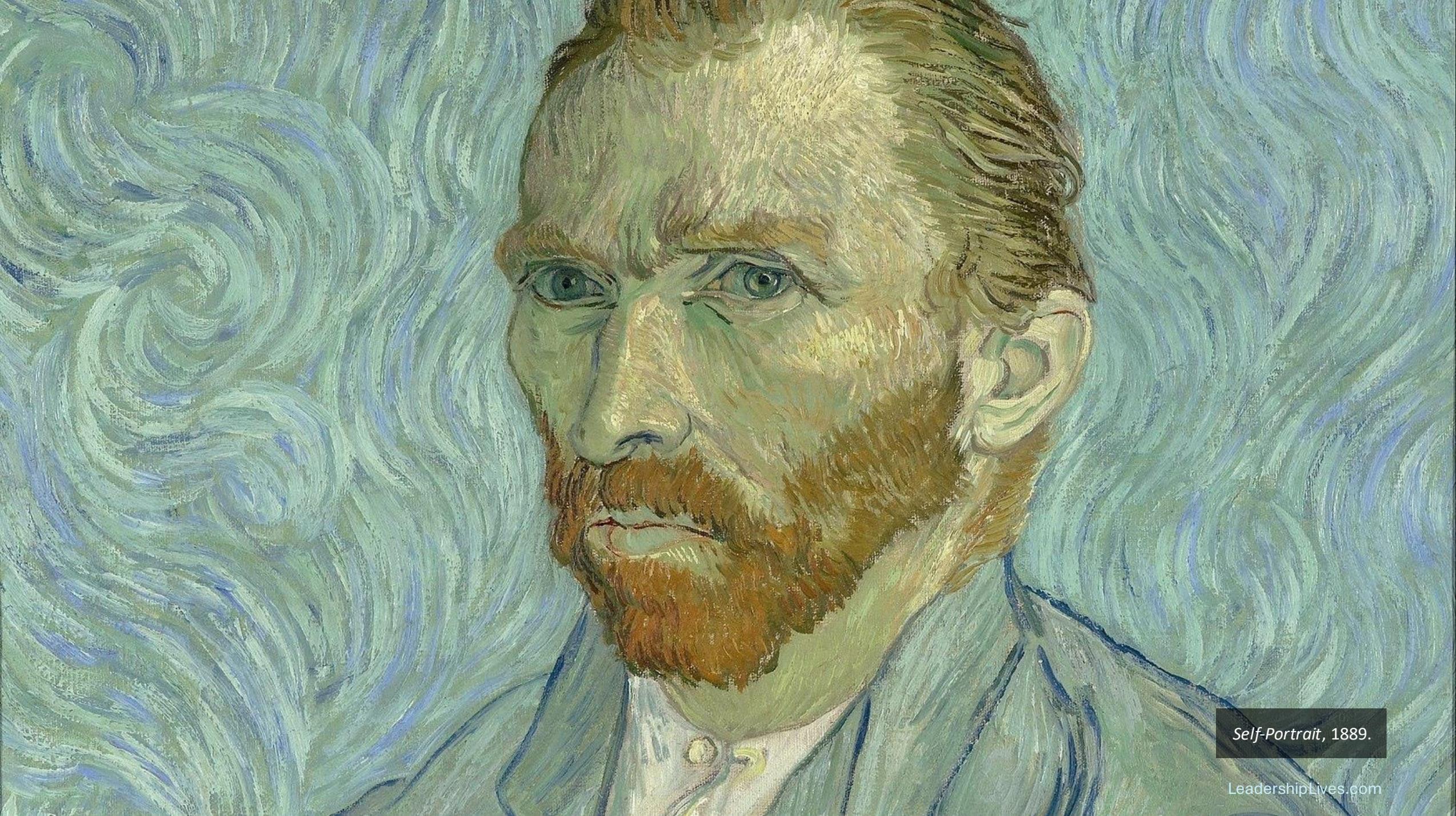


The artist's self-portraits, reveal how his art evolved over the last years of his life.

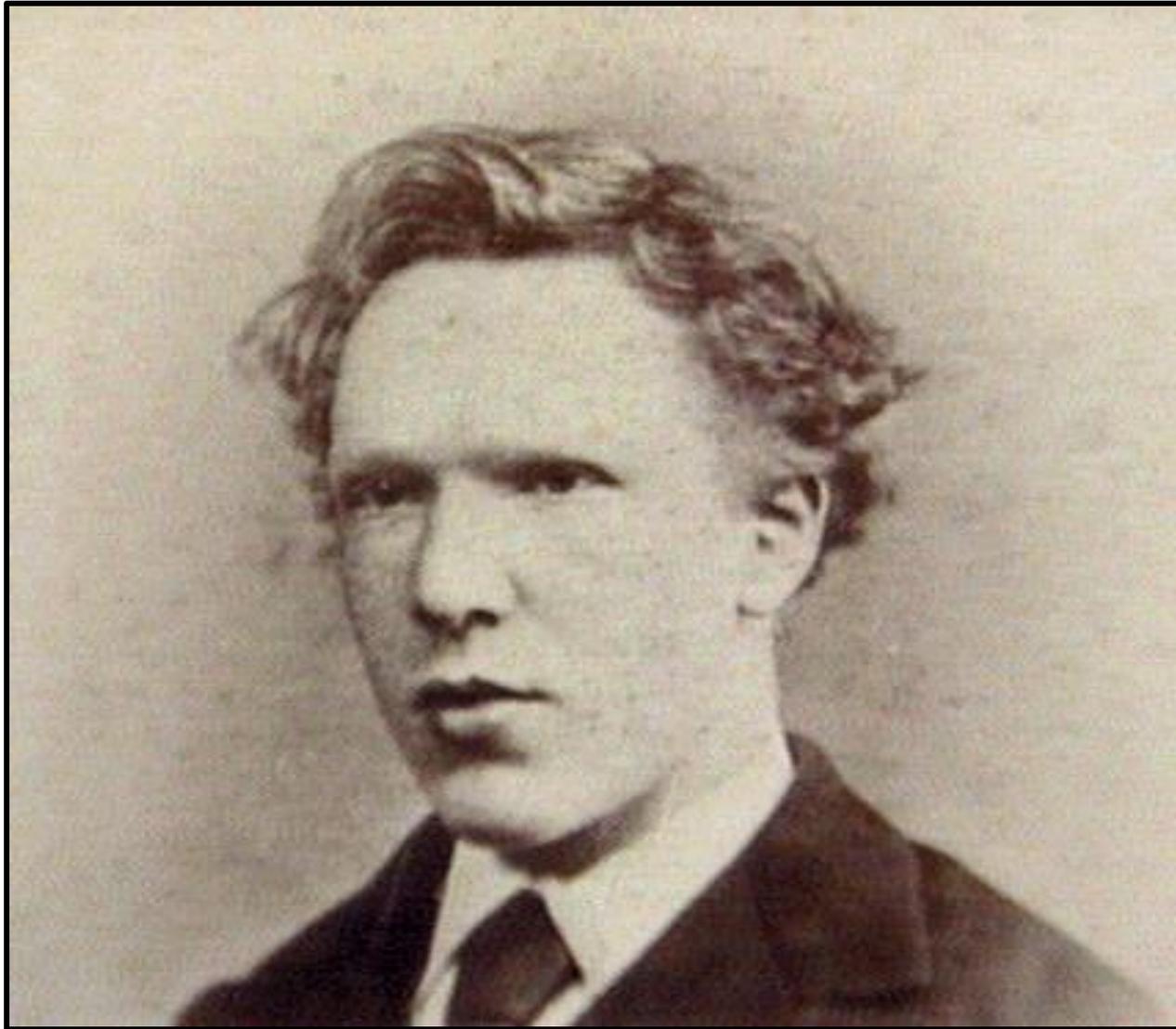
Self-Portrait, 1887.



Self-Portrait, (dedicated to Paul Gauguin) 1888.



Self-Portrait, 1889.



Vincent van Gogh at 20,
while working for Goupil & Cie in The Hague.

Van Gogh was born in Groot-Zundert, Netherlands, near the Belgian border. His father was a pastor in the Dutch Reform Church but the family's connection with art spanned generations. Two uncles were art dealers. A great uncle was a sculptor, and a cousin was a painter.

In middle school, a gifted art teacher encouraged Vincent to draw impressions of nature and everyday objects. When Vincent was fifteen, his uncle hired him as a trainee in The Hague branch of art dealer, Goupil & Cie.

In 1873, Vincent was sent to the firm's London branch and for a while thrived. After a failed romance - he was in love, she was in love with someone else - he transferred to the firm's headquarters in Paris. Despite his uncle's patronage, he was fired after a year.



For three years, he floundered. He worked at a bookstore and flirted with teaching and ministry work. When he flunked an exam for a theology program, he went, as a missionary, to a coal-mining region of Belgium.

There, the people, places and objects in the tiny town of Cuesmes, inspired van Gogh to start drawing.

From 1881 until his death in July 1890, he produced over 2000 works of art, including 870 oil paintings.

The Magrot House, c. 1879 – 1880



Of his three sisters and two brothers, Vincent was closest to Theo who was four years younger.

Theo prospered managing Goupil & Cie's Boulevard Montmartre branch in Paris and provided Vincent with unflagging emotional and financial support, often in the form of tubes of oil paint.

Theo saved over six hundred letters from his brother that document Vincent's thinking about his work.

Vincent famously struggled with bouts of depression and mania, but a different Vincent shines through his letters - the person that his brother knew and loved. Theo and his wife named their son after Vincent.

Portrait of Theo van Gogh by Vincent van Gogh
March or April 1887.



In the autumn of 1880, Theo suggested Vincent study with Dutch artist, Willem Roelofs in Brussels. The artist encouraged Vincent to take classes at the nearby Academie Royale des Beaux-Arts.

May in Noorden, ca. 1882, Willem Roelofs.

Vincent to Theo...

"Dear Brother, You must not take it amiss if I write to you again so soon. I do so only in order to tell you how extraordinarily happy painting makes me feel."

Woman peeling potatoes,
Etten, September 1881.
Black chalk, grey wash, and opaque
transparent watercolor on laid paper.





Vincent to Theo...

"Thanks for your opinion of my drawings, though it's better than I deserve. Keep on writing to me about my work, don't be afraid of hurting me with your criticism, I'll consider such injuries proof of your sympathy, sympathy a thousand times more valuable than flattery."

Woman sewing,
Etten, October - November 1881.
Black, red and brown chalk, wash, opaque
and transparent watercolor on laid paper.



In autumn 1881, Vincent consulted his cousin, Anton Mauve, a successful artist in The Hague. Mauve recommended Vincent start with drawing and pastels. Van Gogh later said studying drawing was the key to his success as a painter. Mauve introduced Vincent to oil painting and helped him set up a studio.

The Vegetable Garden, ca.1886, Anton Mauve.



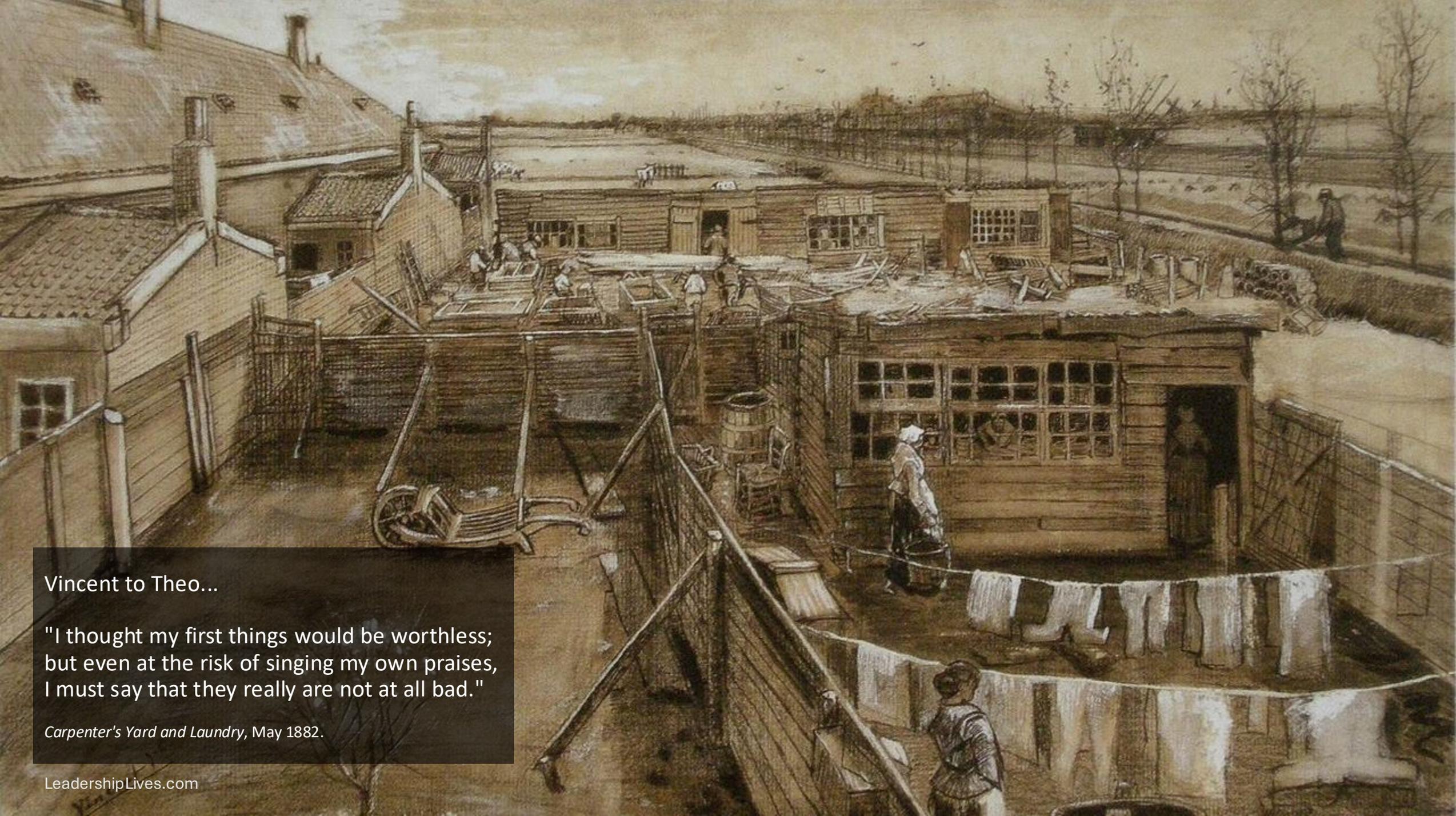
Still Life with Cabbage and Clogs, November 1881

The Hague, early December 1881

My dear Theo,
As you see, I'm writing to you from The Hague. I've been here since last Sunday. ...I spoke to Mauve and said, would you approve if I were to come and trouble you for a good month...

Well, Mauve immediately installed me in front of a still life consisting of a couple of old clogs and other objects, so I could set to work.

And I also go to him in the evenings to draw. ... And Mauve gives me hope that I'll be making something saleable quite soon. Anyway, Mauve said, 'I always thought you were a bloody bore, but now I see that this isn't so'...



Vincent to Theo...

"I thought my first things would be worthless;
but even at the risk of singing my own praises,
I must say that they really are not at all bad."

Carpenter's Yard and Laundry, May 1882.



"I will calmly keep my hand to my plow and continue my furrow."

Letter to Theo.

Women Carrying Sacks of Coal in the Snow, November 1882,
Chalk, brush in ink, opaque and transparent watercolor on woven paper.



Vincent to Theo...

"I desire nothing more than to be deep in the farmland and paint farm life."

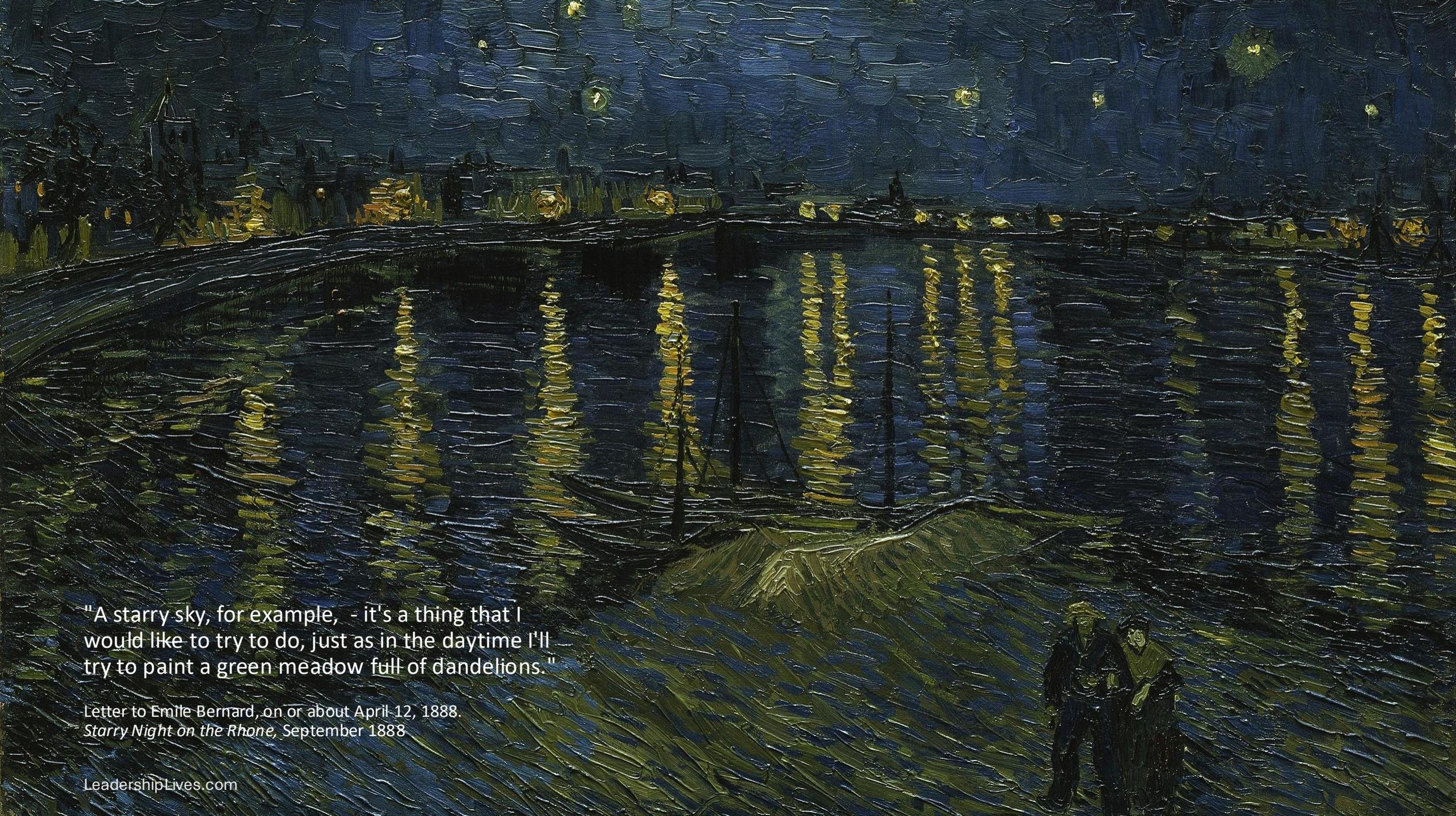
Peasants Planting Potatoes, August – September 1884.



Vincent to Theo...

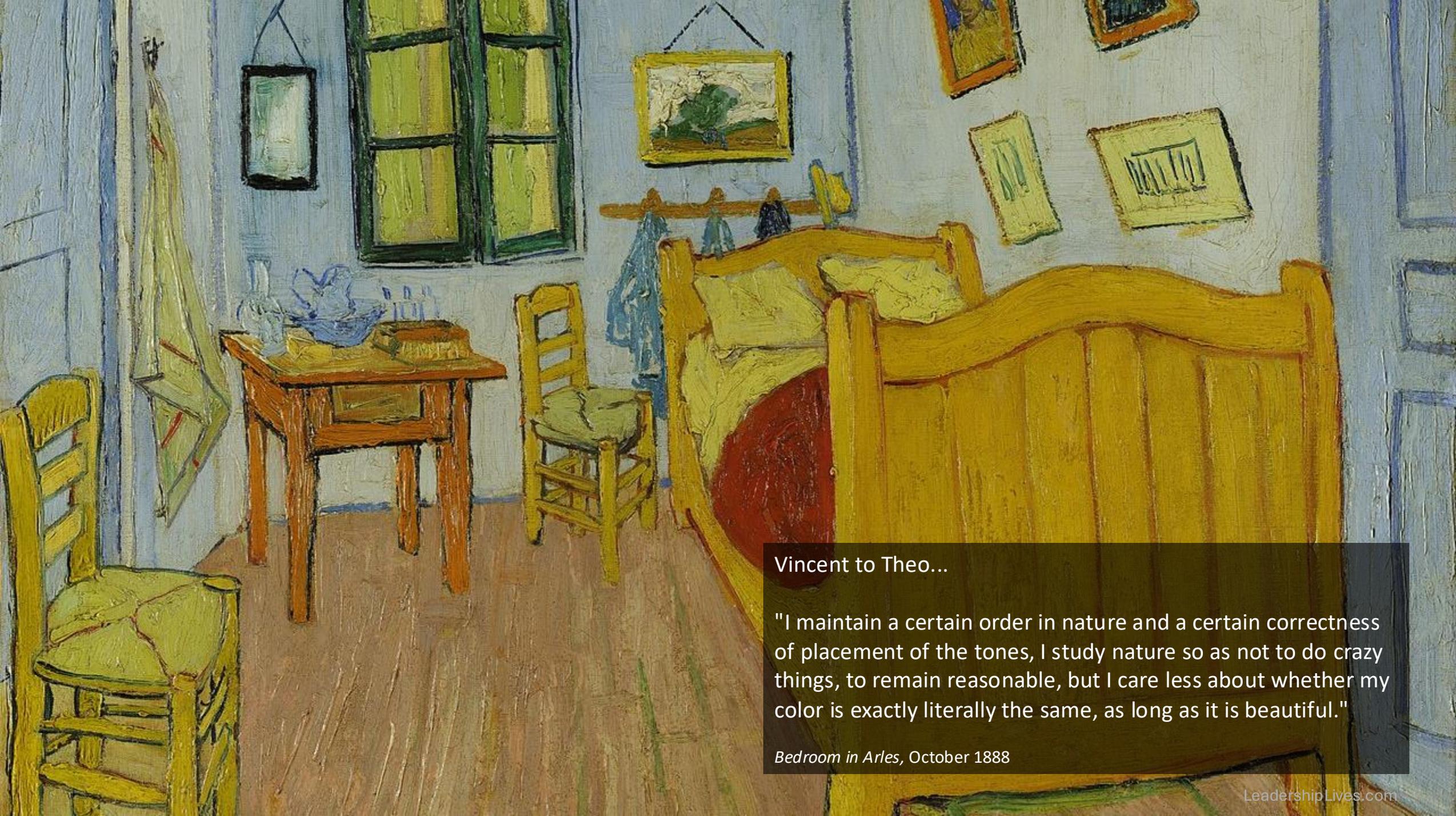
"As for work, I brought back a canvas today, it is a drawbridge over which a small cart passes, which is silhouetted against a blue sky - the blue river also, orange banks with greenery, a group of washerwomen in striped camisoles and bonnets."

Langlois Bridge at Arles with Women Washing,
March 15, 1888



"A starry sky, for example, - it's a thing that I would like to try to do, just as in the daytime I'll try to paint a green meadow full of dandelions."

Letter to Emile Bernard, on or about April 12, 1888.
Starry Night on the Rhone, September 1888



Vincent to Theo...

"I maintain a certain order in nature and a certain correctness of placement of the tones, I study nature so as not to do crazy things, to remain reasonable, but I care less about whether my color is exactly literally the same, as long as it is beautiful."

Bedroom in Arles, October 1888



Vincent to Theo...

"I am sending five studies... a portrait of myself and a landscape painted in a most terrible north wind. ... and, finally, another still life, "A Pair of Peasant's Shoes..."

Shoes
August 1888



Vincent to Theo...

"It seems to me that a painter has a duty to try to put an idea into his work. I was trying to say this in this print — but I can't say it as beautifully, as strikingly as reality, of which this is only a dim reflection seen in a dark mirror — that it seems to me that one of the strongest pieces of evidence for the existence of 'something on high' in which Millet believed, namely in the existence of a God and an eternity, is the unutterably moving quality that there can be in the expression of an old man like that, without his being aware of it perhaps, as he sits so quietly in the corner of his hearth. At the same time something precious, something noble, that can't be meant for the worms."

Van Gogh first drew this portrait, and had a lithograph made of it, in 1882. At that time, he mentioned the drawing in the letter to Theo above. He revisited the subject in 1890.

At Eternity's Gate, May 1890.



Vincent to Theo...

"As far as the commercial value of my work is concerned, I have no pretensions about this other than that I would be very surprised if, over time, my work were not sold just as well as that of others, whether that will happen now or later, well, I think... only to work faithfully according to nature and with tenacity of the heart..."

View of Auvers, May – June 1890.
Van Gogh Museum



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Van Gogh Gallery - vggallery.com

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