

AMI  
Day  
One

# Observation and Imagination in The Starry Night (1889)

The text and image are provided courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art.



Digital Image © 2017 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by John Wronn

*Vincent van Gogh*  
*The Starry Night*  
1889

*Oil on canvas*  
29 x 36 1/4" (73.7 x 92.1 cm)

*The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest*

"This morning I saw the countryside from my window a long time before sunrise, with nothing but the morning star, which looked very big," wrote van Gogh to his brother Theo, describing his inspiration for one of his best-known paintings, *The Starry Night* (1889). The window to which he refers was in the Saint-Paul asylum in Saint-Rémy, in southern France, where he sought respite from his emotional suffering while continuing to make art.

This mid-scale, oil-on-canvas painting is dominated by a moon- and star-filled night sky. It takes up three-quarters of the picture plane and appears turbulent, even agitated, with intensely swirling patterns that seem to roll across its surface like waves. It is pocked with bright orbs—including the crescent moon to the far right, and Venus, the morning star, to the left of center—surrounded by concentric circles of radiant white and yellow light.

Beneath this expressive sky sits a hushed village of humble houses surrounding a church, whose

steeple rises sharply above the undulating blue-black mountains in the background. A cypress tree sits at the foreground of this night scene. Flame-like, it reaches almost to the top edge of the canvas, serving as a visual link between land and sky. Considered symbolically, the cypress could be seen as a bridge between life, as represented by the earth, and death, as represented by the sky, commonly associated with heaven. Cypress trees were also regarded as trees of the graveyard and mourning. "But the sight of the stars always makes me dream," van Gogh once wrote. "Why, I say to myself, should the spots of light in the firmament be less accessible to us than the black spots on the map of France? Just as we take the train to go to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to go to a star."

*The Starry Night* is based on van Gogh's direct observations as well as his imagination, memories, and emotions. The steeple of the church, for example, resembles those common in his native Holland, not in France. The whirling forms in the sky, on the other hand, match published astronomical observations of clouds of dust and gas known as nebulae. At once balanced and expressive, the composition is structured by his ordered placement of the cypress, steeple, and central nebulae, while his countless short brushstrokes and thickly applied paint set its surface in rolling motion. Such a combination of visual contrasts was generated by an artist who found beauty and interest in the night, which, for him, was "much more alive and richly colored than the day."

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe the painting The Starry Night. Support your description with details from the text and painting.
2. What is one example of something in The Starry Night that came from what Van Gogh may have actually seen in France?
3. What is one example of something in The Starry Night that may have come from Van Gogh's imagination or memories?
4. What is the main idea of this text?
5. The word expressive means to effectively convey thought, feeling, or meaning. Why might the text have described The Starry Night as an "expressive" painting? Support your answer with details from the text and painting.

AMI

Day

Two

# Pop Art

This text is provided courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art.

## Pop Art: A Brief History

In the years following World War II, the United States enjoyed an unprecedented period of economic and political growth. Many middle class Americans moved to the suburbs, spurred by the availability of inexpensive, mass-produced homes. Elvis Presley led the emergence of rock and roll, Marilyn Monroe was a reigning film star, and television replaced radio as the dominant media outlet.

Yet by the late 1950s and early 1960s, a "cultural revolution" was underway, led by activists, thinkers, and artists who sought to rethink and even overturn what was, in their eyes, a stifling social order ruled by conformity. The Vietnam War incited mass protests, the Civil Rights Movement sought equality for African Americans, and the women's liberation movement gained momentum.

## Inspired by the Everyday

It was in this climate of turbulence, experimentation, and consumerism that a new generation of artists emerged in Britain and America in the mid- to late-1950s. Pop artists began to look for inspiration in the world around them, representing—and, at times, making art directly from—everyday items, consumer goods, and mass media. They did this in a straightforward manner, using bold swaths of primary colors, often straight from the can or tube of paint. They adopted commercial methods like silkscreening, or produced multiples of works, downplaying the artist's hand and subverting the idea of originality—in marked contrast with the highly expressive, large-scaled abstract works of the Abstract Expressionists, whose work had dominated postwar American art. Pop artists favored realism, everyday (and even mundane) imagery, and heavy doses of irony and wit.

Yet Pop artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein were very aware of the past. They sought to connect fine art traditions with pop culture elements from television, advertisements, films, and cartoons. At the same time, their work challenged traditional boundaries between media, combining painted gestures with photography and printmaking; combining handmade and readymade or mass-produced elements; and combining objects, images, and sometimes text to make new meanings.

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# Photography and Public Image

This text is provided courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art.

Photography and celebrity have become so intertwined that our understanding of famous figures is largely shaped by the images we see of them. Before the invention of photography, the likenesses of the rich, famous, and illustrious could be found on coins and in paintings and statues. With the advent of film negatives in the 1840s, photographic portraits could be reproduced and widely disseminated. Roughly 150 years later, when digital cameras were introduced and widely adopted in the 1990s, it became easier than ever to take, circulate, and manipulate pictures of people.

Early in photography's history, those with means and stature went to photography studios to have their portraits taken. The resulting images were formal and posed. As camera shutter speeds increased and technology advanced, photographers began to experiment with new ways of picturing public figures. While some photographers reinforce celebrities' public personas through carefully structured portraits, others have sought to uncover and capture something of the real, unguarded person behind their public image.

## Nadar's Portraiture



Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon)



*Théophile Gautier*

No one explored notions of celebrity and portraiture more exhaustively during the nineteenth century than French photographer Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, known as Nadar. Not only a photographer, but also a printmaker, cartoonist, and hot air balloonist, he moved in bohemian circles and was friends with many of France's most prominent cultural figures. He opened his Paris photographic studio in 1854, and also ran a thriving business making small cartes de visite for his clients, most of them members of the Parisian elite.

Nadar rejected the formal poses that were then the norm in celebrity portraits, instead making photographs that conveyed the romantic and free artistic spirit of his subjects, and a sense of the photographer's intimacy with them. In this portrait, French writer and critic Théophile Gautier's bohemian appearance reinforces his image as an iconoclast who did not adhere to social norms. This and Nadar's other portraits exemplify how celebrated and prominent figures used photographic portraiture to construct and establish their public personas early in the history of the medium.

## **A Most Favorable Resemblance**

Nadar prided himself on his ability to draw out the essence of his subjects in his portraits of them. He once said of his technique, "It's the swift tact that puts you in communion with the model, makes you size him up, grasp his habits and ideas in accordance with his character, and allows you to render, not an indifferent plastic reproduction that could be made by the lowliest laboratory worker, commonplace and accidental, but the resemblance that is most familiar and most favorable, the intimate resemblance."

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. The photographer Nadar rejected formal poses in celebrity portraits. What did he convey instead with his photographs?
2. What was one possible goal of celebrity portraiture during Nadar's time? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
3. What is the main idea of this text?
4. Why might a celebrity have wanted a photographer like Nadar to take his or her portrait, rather than a traditional or formal photographer? Support your answer with details from the text.

**AMI  
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# The Tower

The text and image are provided courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art.



Digital image © 2017 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo by John Wronn

*Robert Delaunay*

*The Tower*

*(1911) (inscribed 1910)*

*Ink and pencil on paper*

*21 1/4 x 19 1/4" (53.9 x 48.9 cm)*

*The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund*

As the world's tallest monument at the time, the Eiffel Tower was for Delaunay a symbol of both modernity and masculinity, and he depicted it time and again. He was among the first artists to focus on this Parisian landmark as a subject. Rather than represent the Eiffel Tower from one view, Delaunay's drawing uses rhythmically placed lines and patterns to capture his experience of the tower from multiple perspectives.

The drawing is an example of Delaunay's engagement with the dynamic architecture of Paris at the turn of the 20th century. The Eiffel Tower was just one of the exciting public projects undertaken during an era that would later be described as the Belle Époque (French for "beautiful era"). In comparison to the horrors of World War I that would follow it, the Belle Époque was a time of peace, invention, and intense art production for France and its neighbors.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1.** What does Robert Delaunay's drawing use to capture his experience of the tower from multiple perspectives?

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**2.** Explain whether or not Delaunay's drawing of the Eiffel Tower is very realistic. Support your answer with evidence from the text and drawing.

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**3.** The text states the drawing shown here is an example of Delaunay's engagement with the dynamic architecture of Paris at the turn of the 20th century. How does Delaunay reflect the Eiffel Tower's "dynamic architecture" in his drawing? Use evidence from the drawing to support your answer.

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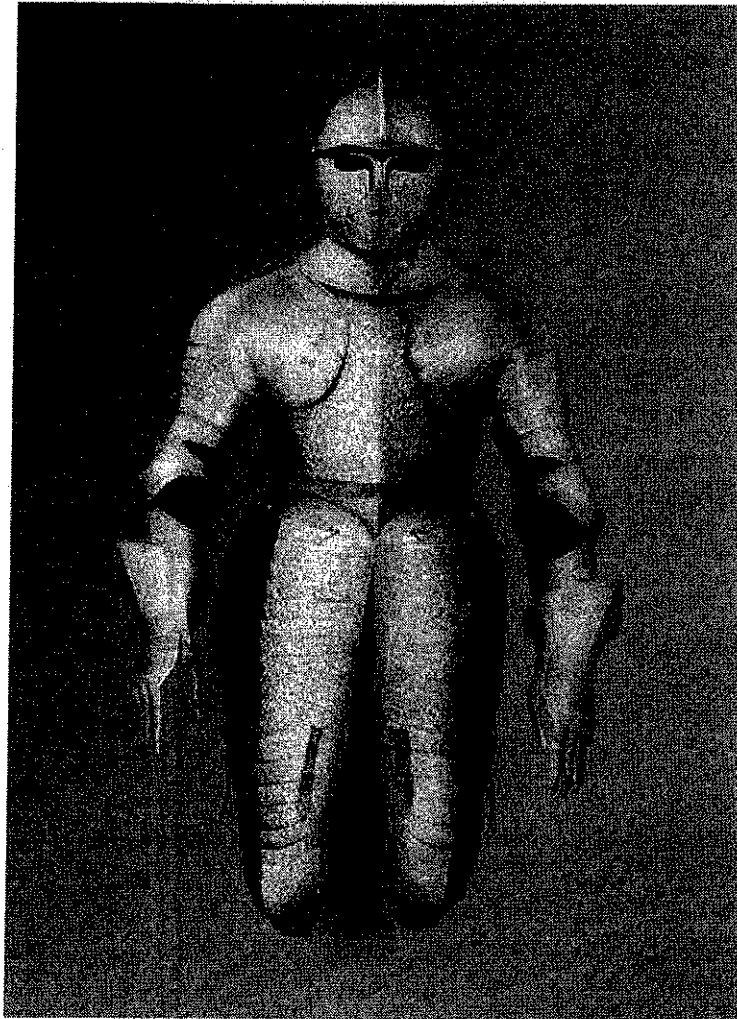
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**AMI  
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## About Cuirassier Armor

This text and image are provided courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



*1612 Etched and partially blackened steel; leather (replaced) Weight: 63 lb. (28.58 kg) Height (top edge of comb to bottom edge of tassets): 40 11/16 inches (103.4 cm) Girth at waist : exterior about 38 9/16 inches (98 cm) Width (across midpoints of shoulders): 24 inches, 2 feet (61 x 61 cm) Width (across outer midpoint of couter: arms relaxed & don't touch cuir): 31 7/8 inches (81 cm) Length (down center of tasset, from waist to midpoint of poleyn): 24 3/16 inches (61.5 cm) Depth (helmet, from brim across to level of rear neck plate): 14 9/16 inches (37 cm) Width (backplate across the waist ... about): 12 13/16 inches (32.5 cm) Northern Italian or French*

### About This Armor

This suit of armor, along with six similar armors, was made in 1612 for a German ruler named Johann Georg I of Saxony (Saxony is now the city of Dresden). His wife, Magdalena Sibylla, presented all seven sets of armor to him as a Christmas gift. We know that they were actually used on July 4, 1613, in a tournament celebrating the baptism of the couple's son and heir, also named Johann Georg. In this particular military sporting event, the contestants fought on foot with swords instead of on horseback with lances.

The men who made plate armor like this suit were highly skilled craftspeople. To produce suits of armor, they hammered bars of iron and steel into flat plates. Then they created patterns based on

their customers' bodies and shaped the metal pieces to fit exactly. This armor is densely covered with intricate designs-intertwining leaves, flowers, and fruits, as well as four fierce lion faces on the breastplate and the back plate, and on each couter (elbow defense). Artists who collaborated with the armor makers created the designs by etching (cutting into) the metal with acid, blackening the surface with paint or varnish, then wiping and polishing it, leaving the ink in the etched lines only.

This suit of armor weighs sixty-three pounds and provides both protection and mobility. Although plate armor looks inflexible, parts of it like the cuisses (kweeses) (plates covering the front thighs) are made of many separate pieces, like the shell covering the tail of a lobster, to allow a full range of movement.

*This object is included in Learning to Look: 20 Works of Art Across Time and Cultures, a teaching kit developed by the Division of Education and made possible by the Comcast Foundation, The Delphi Project Foundation, and Reliance Standard Life Insurance Company.*

Bequest of Carl Otto Kretschmar von Kienbusch, 1977



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. This suit of armor was made in 1612 for a German ruler named Johann Georg I of Saxony. Who made plate armor like this?

2. Summarize the process by which suits of armor like this one were made.

Use at least two examples from the text to support your answer.

3. What is the main idea of this text?

4. The suit of armor discussed in the text was used in a military sporting event where contestants fought on foot with swords. Why might this suit of armor have been a good thing to wear during this event?

Support your answer with at least two pieces of information from the text.