

# Michael Johnathon

## Oils on Canvas and the Incorporation of Style

I've studied Rembrandt, da Vinci, Michelangelo and many others during the Florence period, the Impressionism of the 1800-early 1900's like Monet, Renoir, Pissarro and Morisot and settled on the influence on van Gogh as a personal style.

Not copying him, just incorporating his techniques.

### *Did You Know*

Vincent Van Gogh began painting when he was 28 years old, he died when he was only 37. What an amazing body of work that he created in ten years ... and yet he sold only one painting.

Just. One.

The canvas here is Van Gogh's *Starry Night Over the Rhone*, painted a year before his more famous *Starry Night*. This is a brilliant work, probably my favorite of all his paintings.

He once wrote, "*Whenever I need God, I paint the stars.*"

Oh, those stars. Yet, when viewed up-close, the brush strokes seem almost sloppy, careless. While alive, this painting, like all his work, was unsellable. Other artists, the public and collectors hated it, saying it was childish at best. No gallery owner would even dare show it.

If sold today, auction houses like Christie and Sotheby expect *Starry Night Over the Rhone* to command a \$200-300 MILLION dollar selling price.

### *Van Gogh's Final Painting*

Believed to have been mostly completed hours before he was shot in the chest, rumored to be self-inflicted but now understood most likely to have been shot by young boys, it is a positive dance of light and pain.

If you expand the picture below you can see how defined and simple his use of paint and brush strokes are, so unlike other painters of his day.

His habit of outlining the subject of his paintings, later a style adopted by cartoonists, infuriated collectors, fellow artists and gallery owners.

Also, unlike impressionistic painters of his day who used tiny brush strokes and dots to create the illusion of their subjects, van Gogh used long brush strokes, very unique to his style.

*"Occasionally, in times of worry, I've longed to be stylish, but on second thought I say no, let me be myself, and express true things with rough workmanship."*

Vincent van Gogh

To create something beautiful, you must imagine it first. Vincent used his imagination when translating what he saw. He was interested in the magic on the canvas, not the technique. For his honesty, he was crushed by public opinion and the artworld.

*"I shall never amount to anything as an artist, I just know it."* Vincent Van Gogh



Vincent outlived and out performed his critics, who drifted into the dust of time, never to be heard from again. But his painting, as amateur and childish as they were deemed, live seemingly forever.

*“What am I in the eyes of most people? Somebody who has no position in society and will never have; the lowest of the low ... Though I am often in the depths of misery, there is still calmness, pure harmony and music inside me. I see paintings or drawings in everything.”* Vincent Van Gogh

In the end, why was Vincent so successful? He dies a failure in 1890 and by 1905 he was a bonifide legend. What changed? His artwork didn't. His childish strokes of the brush and thick, sloppy layering of paint didn't.

Opinion did.

And he went from worthless to an invaluable artistic gold mine. What all those other artists didn't realize was Van Gogh's legacy was not his refined use of the brush, it was the fact his artwork was accessible. It screamed, *“Look! You can do this, too!”* That is why the public lionized his work.

I call it the Bob Dylan formula. Dylan's music is not “complicated” and his chord structures are very basic and simple. They are songs anybody could play, anybody could sing and anybody could emulate.

That *simplicity* is the artistic styling I chose. I wanted my paintings to feel accessible.

### *An Example:*

#### **MY OLD BROWN EARTH (Ma Vieille Terre Brune)**

Here is a photo of a work in progress. It wasn't until I was almost finished with the painting that I realized what it was actually about... Pete Seeger has a tender song called *My Old Brown Earth*, a sensitive song about his own impending passing. It has become the title of this oil painting.

I did not understand why everything in the painting was so symbolic, mystical and... well, brown. Why was I leaving Pete as a undefined silhouette? The painting reflects his love for the Hudson river, the Clearwater, his banjo without his slogan on it, he's singing but to no audience. Even the flowers become red white and blue.

I won't explain what the symbolism in the painting means to me personally, you can have your own interpretation ... even if it's something that you care to dwell on.

This is a good example of the technique I chose.

