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**Van Gogh celebrates the peasant workers who toil in this vineyard in southern France. They enjoy the open air and sunshine the artist loved.**

# Working in Fields of Sunshine

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

The workers depicted here by Vincent van Gogh are the subject of the only painting by the artist known to have been purchased during his lifetime. It is believed that he painted the vineyard from memory.

Van Gogh had worked and studied in London, Antwerp, and The Hague. But it is not until seeing the paintings of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists in Paris that he changed his palette dramatically in 1887 to use brighter, less opaque colors. Like the Impressionists, he painted from life, preferred the use of natural light, and employed the synthetic evocation of color through Divisionism (the juxtaposition of small touches of pure, unmixed pigment directly on the canvas). This last characteristic became the expressive trademark of his later works.<sup>1</sup>

In February 1888, Van Gogh left the bustle of Paris to live in Arles, a small town in southern France. He was inspired by Jean-Francois Millet's paintings that focused on the work of the common peasant. Van Gogh enjoyed studying the workers as he viewed the golden wheat fields, the blossoming orchards, and sunflowers that appear in his later and most famous paintings.

*The Red Vineyard* was first viewed in Brussels in the invitation-only exhibition of *Les XX* in 1890. *Les XX* was a group of twenty avant-garde Belgian painters, designers, and sculptors formed in 1883 to exhibit their art annually. They also invited twenty international artists each year, and Vincent van Gogh was among them in 1890 and 1891. Van Gogh exhibited six paintings, including *The Red Vineyard* and the two (now) famous *Sunflowers* (today in the National Gallery, London, and Neue Pinakothek, Munich). Van Gogh's paintings were attacked and criticized by member Henry de Groux two days before the exhibit opened, but his friends Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Paul Signac came to his defense. *The Red Vineyard* was purchased by Anna Boch, painter and founding member of *Les XX*, and its provenance can be traced to its current location in the Puskin Museum.<sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

1 "Gogh, Vincent Willem van," *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*, *Oxford Art Online* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), [www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/subscriber/article/benezit/B00076203](http://www.oxfordartonline.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/subscriber/article/benezit/B00076203) (accessed June 12, 2015).

2 For more on Anna Boch, see [annaboeh.com/theredvineyard/](http://annaboeh.com/theredvineyard/) (accessed June 9, 2015).