

New Van Gogh self portrait discovered in Edinburgh

The newest painting which will go on display at National Galleries of Scotland this summer is almost certainly a self-portrait by Vincent Van Gogh which was previously undiscovered.

The conservators at the galleries revealed the image when taking an x-ray of the 1885 work *Head of a Peasant Woman* which will be shown in the upcoming exhibition *A Taste for Impressionism* at the Royal Academy of Scotland from 30 July to 13 November.

On the back of the canvas featuring that work – and which is held together by glue and cardboard believed to be applied in the early twentieth century – the experts discovered the self-portrait. The conservators are now faced with trying to remove the layers of glue and cardboard perhaps to uncover the portrait, but without harming the painting on the other side.

Until that is perhaps solved the only way to see the new self-portrait is in an x-ray image showing a bearded sitter with a neckerchief. The image fixes the viewer with an intense stare, the right side of his face in shadow and left ear clearly visible.



Conservator Lesley Stevenson made the discovery PHOTO Neil Hanna Photography

Professor Frances Fowle, Senior Curator of French Art at the National Galleries of Scotland, said: "Moments like this are incredibly rare. We have discovered an unknown work by Vincent van Gogh, one of the most important and popular artists in the world. What an incredible gift for Scotland, and one that will forever be in the care of the National Galleries. We are very excited to share this thrilling discovery in our big summer exhibition *A Taste for Impressionism*, where the x-ray image of the self-portrait will be on view for all to see."

<https://twitter.com/natgalleriessco/status/1547498861878550529?s=21&t=czrIUbiCOKx3Ngl3xC66LA>

The condition of the underlying self-portrait is not known but, if it can be uncovered, it is expected to help shed new light on this enigmatic and beguiling artist. Later in date than the *Head of a Peasant Woman*, the hidden painting is likely to have been made during a key moment in Van Gogh's career, when he was exposed to the work of the French impressionists after moving to Paris. The experience had a

profound effect and was a major influence on why he adopted a more colourful and expressive style of painting – one that is so much admired today.

Head of a Peasant Woman entered the NGS collection in 1960, as part of the gift of an Edinburgh lawyer, Alexander Maitland, in memory of his wife Rosalind. Dating from an early period in Van Gogh's career, the painting shows a local woman from the town of Nuenen in the south of the Netherlands, where the artist lived from December 1883 to November 1885.

Painted in March or April 1885, it seems to be a likeness of Gordina de Groot (known as Sien) who was a model for Van Gogh's early masterpiece *The Potato Eaters* of 1885 (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam). Her facial features, white cap and simple work clothes are sketched in oil, using broad brushstrokes and earthy colours typical of French realist artists such as Jean-François Millet, whom Van Gogh greatly admired.

Once revealed, the hidden self-portrait will be part of a group of several such self-portraits and other works painted on the back of earlier canvases from the Nuenen period. Five examples are in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. Others in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut; and the Kunstmuseum Den Haag. Records in the Van Gogh Museum confirm that in 1929 the cardboard was removed from three of their Nuenen pictures by the Dutch restorer Jan Cornelis Traas, revealing the portraits on the verso.



Professor Frances Fowle with the Head of a Peasant Woman by Van Gogh PHOTO Neil Hanna Photography

A TASTE FOR IMPRESSIONISM: MODERN FRENCH ART FROM MILLET TO MATISSE

30 July 2022 – 13 November 2022

Royal Scottish Academy

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A Taste for Impressionism at the Royal Scottish Academy will focus on the pioneering nineteenth-century Scottish collectors who had the foresight to invest in the avant-garde, with a stellar cast of artists represented including Monet, Gauguin and Van Gogh. While today a work by any of these names will fetch millions at auction, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these artists were pilloried by the press and the prices for their paintings were surprisingly low. Many collectors were 'new money'; individuals who had made their fortune from industry and were keen to acquire edgy works by modern and contemporary artists. Among them were several Scots

who collected pieces by Degas, Monet, Pissarro and Cézanne well before their English counterparts. As the market for Impressionism began to thrive, a more sinister side industry in 'fakes' took hold. A Taste for Impressionism will include a few of these counterfeit works, one of which will remain unidentified to test visitors' powers of discernment. The exhibition will run from 30 July 2022 – 13 November 2022 and is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.