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Mr. Greco

English III

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Language through Art

In “I’m Not ‘Mrs. America.’ That’s the Point,” Cate Blanchett, an actor and producer, asserts that art is a universal language that connection with one another. Starting with her connection with COVID-19, she acknowledges that the human social structure that connects us together relies on communication and comprehension just like scientific study and investigation depend on facts and data. Additionally, art itself is a social research that results in the wonders of society. Overall, art shares communication through different depictions and complex emotions.

Blanchett’s argument connects to several paintings by Vincent Van Gogh: *The Starry Night* (c.1889), *Cafe Terrace at Night* (c.1888), and *Prisoners Round* (c.1890). In particular, Blanchett’s point about communication in art gives viewers a connection to Van Gogh's feelings that he communicates through his paintings through different methods of paint strokes, colors, and impressionism. The famous *Starry Night* depicts this with its dark



Fig. 1. Van Gogh. *Starry Night*. C.1889.oldholland

In Starry Night (see fig. 1), Van Gogh presents a deep depiction of swirling cool dark undertones and contrasting bright white strokes. Van Gogh at the time was suffering from mental health and painted this in an asylum. The swirls in the sky share his inner distress and emotional misery as reflected in the whirling patterns in the turbulent sky. The contrast of the bright stars above the dark city shows hope and desire portraying an escape from reality and thought or the peace from heaven where he would no longer have to be in distress. The prominent cypress tree brings symbolic truth to Van Gogh's thoughts of death and grief as many religions share with this tree. The city appears calm with the stars above but a contrasting darkness of the tree creeping over the painting facing our vision to the darkness on the canvas. The sum of the painting is to communicate the idea of suffrage and an essence of hope being out of reach with the darkness overwhelming the light.



Fig. 2. Van Gogh. Cafe Terrace at Night. C.1888.wikipedia

In the painting *Cafe Terrace at Night (see fig.2)*, Van Gogh paints the sensory of a calmly lit restaurant with a dark alleyway. The warm yellows and oranges of the painting embody a lively dinner scene, inviting the viewer to think about the occasion. Within the sky, the deep blue tones allow for the bright stars to shine through, creating a feeling of calm and serenity. It is important to note that this painting was one of the first of his to depict the night sky, which set

the stage for his famous starry night sky painting and other sky studies. In contrast to the other paintings of this era, Van Gogh chose not to draw specific faces or make them extremely realistic, which allows the audience to focus instead on the work as a whole and interpret the work in their own way.

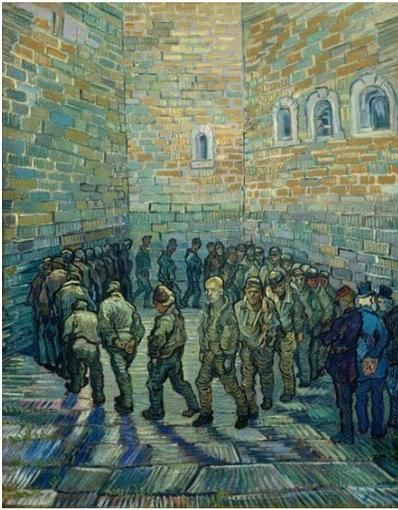


Fig.3. Van Gogh. *Prisoners Exercising*. C.1890. <https://www.vincentvanogh.org>

In contrast with the other two landscape paintings, *Starry Night* and *Cafe Terrace at Night*, this painting shows prisoners in a confined space walking in circles. Similar to his previous works, this painting was created while he was suffering in the asylum. As one of Van Gogh's last works before his death, the lack of room for imagination beyond the canvas references his internal thoughts and his feelings of isolation. The walls feel tight, forcing viewers to empathize with the emotions of being trapped and stuck in the place he was. The dark and dull undertones of the painting present emotionless prisoners. However, our eyes can be drawn to the bright blue uniform worn by the prison guard in the bottom corner, illustrating that he is still filled with life and exerting power over the crowd. Despite the dark undertones at the bottom of the painting, hints of yellow and white near the top can be interpreted as hope. (*fig. 1. fig2*) The

only escape from the never-ending circle is the light above, which can be interpreted as heaven or a place to go after death, similar to the use of stars in prior paintings.

This example of Van Gogh's work illustrates his complex feelings of trappedness and depression, through different paint strokes and lighting patterns. Van Gogh's styles have fluctuated through his period of emotions and have been able to communicate emotions through each one of his creations. All three of the paintings connect to Blanchett's idea that art is a universal language that connects us humans together. Through Van Gogh, we are able to understand the depressed thoughts and unhappy feelings and understand the paintings he created thus showing the human connection we feel towards art and its significance.

Works Cited

Cate Blanchet. "I'm Not 'Mrs. America.' That's the Point," *The New York Times*, May 21, 2020,

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Note on the use of generative AI:

When writing this paper, I used ChatGPT. Although I didn't directly copy the findings, I did use the following questions to improve my knowledge of how the different Elements of Art can be used to conduct analysis of each piece. Using my own method of analyzing and comprehending each work's meaning, Chat GTP assisted me in choosing which components and concepts to emphasize.

- What is the deeper meaning of Cafe Terrace at Night?
- What does Starry Night represent?
- What is Van Gough's connection to his art?