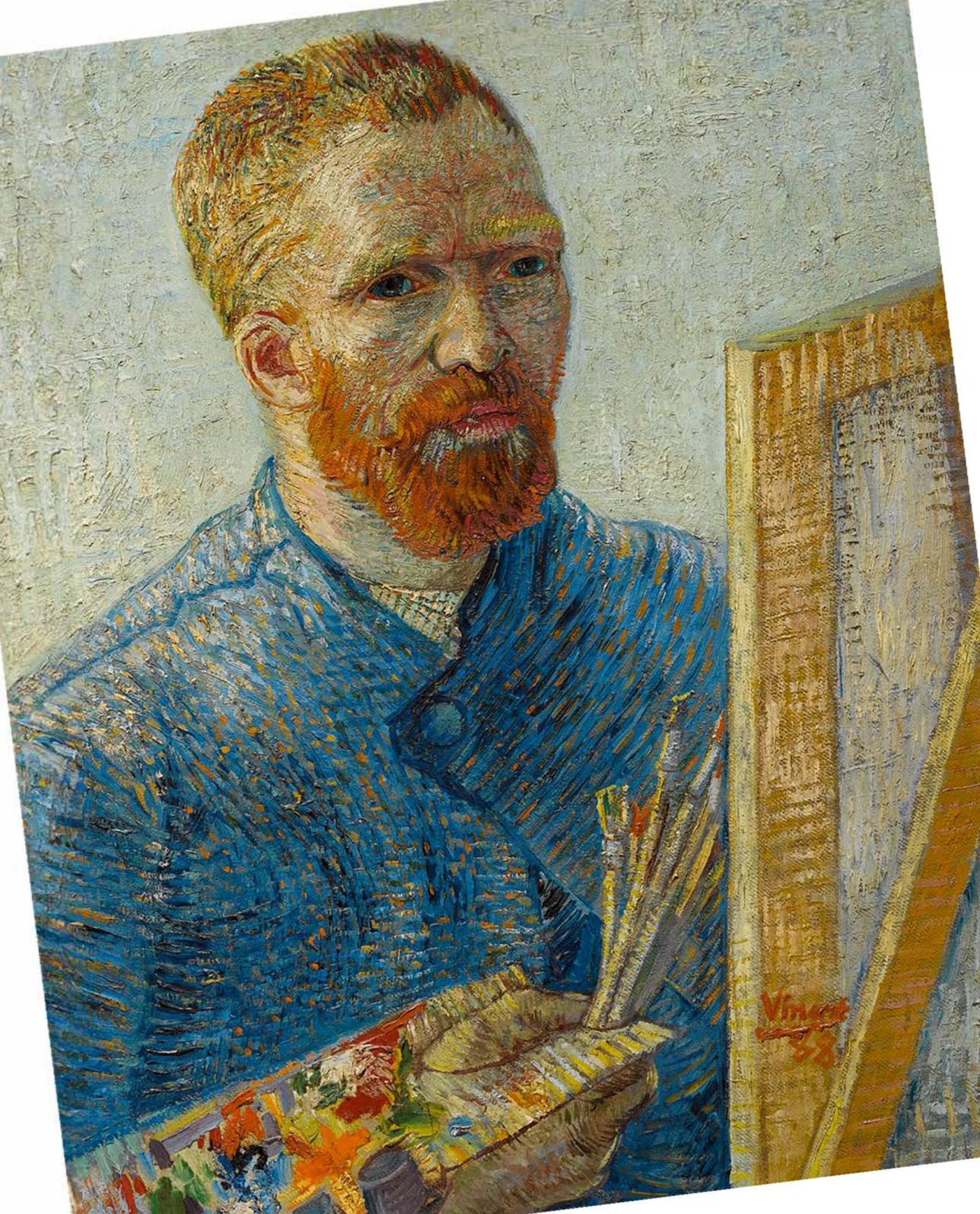


VAN GOGH



MASTERS OF ART

VAN GOGH

Isabel Kuhl

PRESTEL

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Front Cover: Vincent van Gogh, *Sunflowers*,
1888, Neue Pinakothek, Munich (detail, see page 75)

Frontispiece: Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait as a Painter*, 1887/88,
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

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INTRODUCTION

Vincent van Gogh's artistic career spanned a mere ten years. In this short amount of time he not only produced a varied and masterly oeuvre, he also accomplished an impressive change in his painting style, his colouring and his subject matter. And yet van Gogh was a largely self-taught draughtsman and painter. The man who produced the long since world-famous sunflowers and starry nights was essentially an autodidact who turned to art only relatively late: in the 1870s the young Vincent first worked as an art dealer, then as a supply teacher. He ultimately hoped to study theology and become a preacher: Then, after his career plans had been dashed, in 1880 he wagered everything on becoming an artist. To that end he began to draw almost excessively, later to paint as well, mainly motifs from his Dutch homeland in earthy, dark colours—referring to himself as a peasant painter.

But when at thirty van Gogh moved to Paris he abruptly changed his style and his palette. From Montmartre he immersed himself in the city's art world, became familiar with modern art at lightning speed and truly got started. In the next five years he painted all the works that would make him so famous, the *Terrace of a Café at Night*, *The Starry Night*, portraits in radiant colours, pictures of almond blossoms and again and again lush bouquets of sunflowers. While capturing Parisian and somewhat later Provençal motifs in bright colours he frequently felt isolated and was almost always short of money. He suffered worsening health and took care of himself, if at all, only so as to be able to keep painting. When van Gogh took his own life in 1890 he left behind an impressive oeuvre of more than 900 paintings and roughly 1,000 drawings and sketches. It is incomprehensible that all these were produced in only a decade.

Many of Vincent van Gogh's picture motifs have meanwhile become almost ubiquitous, confronting us on calendar pages and coffee cups; others have been virtually forgotten. The present volume includes a selection of famous and less familiar pictures and drawings that reflect van Gogh's development—all of them fascinating. As the selection shows, van Gogh mastered a variety of genres: he drew and painted landscapes most of all, at the same time experimenting time and again with new artistic approaches in his still lifes and he had a special fondness for figural painting. And when van Gogh lacked models, as was most often the case, he painted himself. No fewer than thirty-six self-portraits survive. He captured himself on canvas for the first time shortly after his arrival in Paris and it was only a few years later that he painted his last, remarkable self-portraits. These were done after he