

ANALYZE

PRODUCED AND
DIRECTED by
LES LEVINE

The story of Vincent

LOVERS

MICKERY AMSTERDAM
CENTRAAL MUSEUM UTRECHT



OBJECT

DEL

IDEA

EFFECT

MEANING

ANALYSIS







ANALYZE LOVERS

The story of Vincent

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED

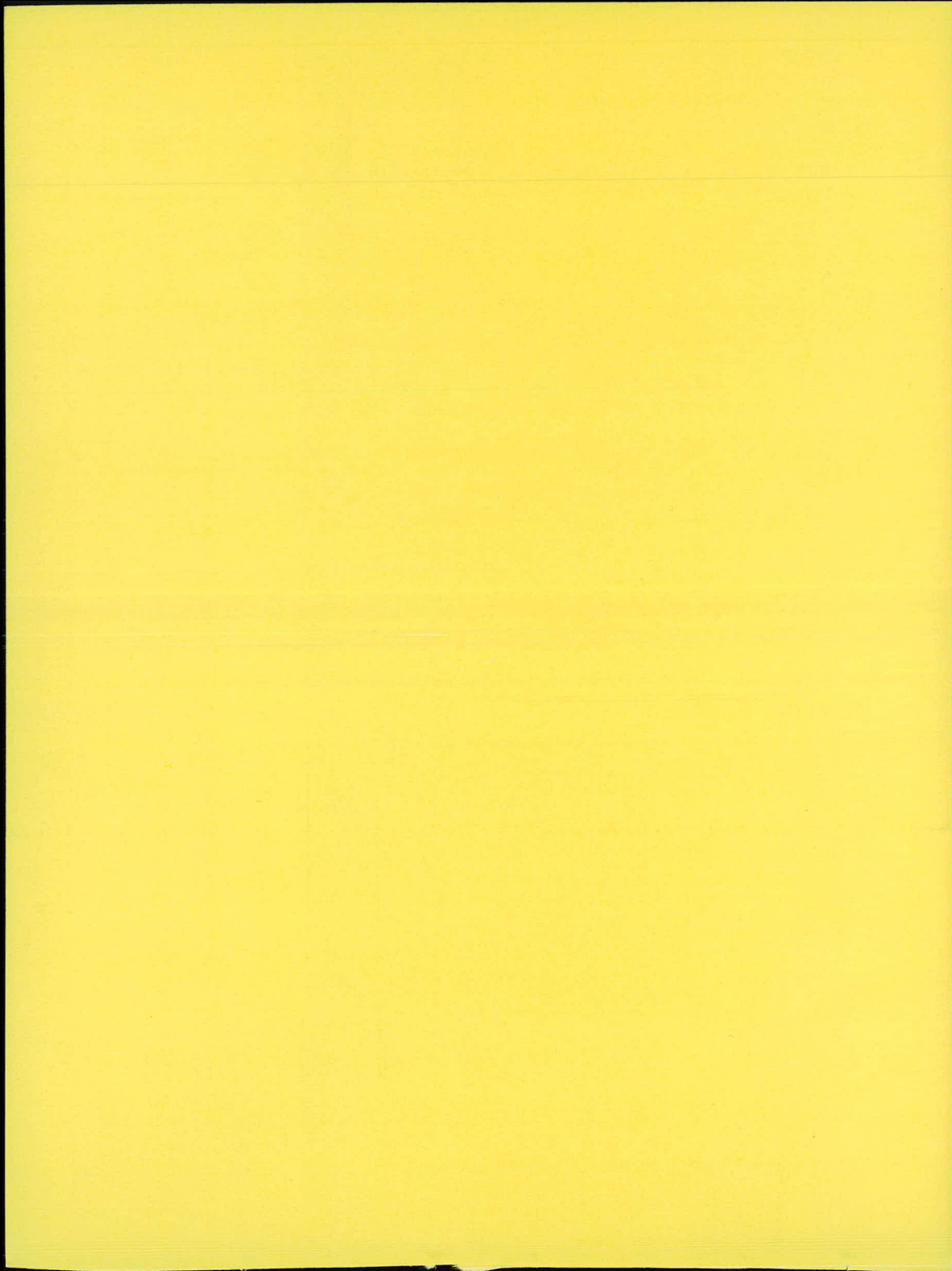
by

LES LEVINE

MICKERY AMSTERDAM

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This program is produced with support from the Van Gogh '90 Foundation



Catalogue Statement

The title ANALYZE LOVERS comes from a Vincent van Gogh letter talking about critics in which he remarked, "They love to analyze". All of the words on the billboards are derived from and are a condensation of the letters.

The piece is not about the art of Vincent van Gogh, but rather his myth as seen through mass media. It is the story which has been handed down to us through the media - his information, so to speak.

The billboards are derived from Vincent's own painting entitled THE POTATO HARVESTERS. It seemed interesting to consider that particular work as a point of departure for uncovering the story of Vincent.

In a sense, ANALYZE LOVERS reminds one of an archaeological site which is surrounded by various experts each having their own particular opinion as to the meaning of what has been found at the site.

In travelling to do the interviews, both in the United States and Europe, from time to time one felt the way an adult-orphan must feel in search of their ancestral roots. So many things occur to one, it hardly seems possible to cover them all.

It became clear to me that the search for Vincent in some way became connected to the search for art's meaning in this society at present. Of course, many questions are left unanswered. Nevertheless, I think we succeeded in telling the story that's possible to be told at the moment and in the process were able to incorporate large varieties of societal attitudes about art and art making into our media portrait.

Those who were interviewed deserve our warmest thanks for being so patient and forthright and such good sports. One hopes it will be understood, of course, that their statements have been broadly edited, but we have in all cases tried to maintain their attitude and meaning as intact and truthful as possible. Finally, the video interviews are like media portraiture of a cross section of present day art attitudes, and anxieties as we come to the end of the century.

I want to especially thank Ritsaert ten Cate who was one of the first people to exhibit my work in Europe over 20 years ago and who initiated my involvement in this project. I'm sure that Vincent would have loved such long-standing interest in his work. Many thanks to John Perreault for his wonderful portrayal of Vincent. It seems obvious from John's portrayal that Vincent was a calmer and more thoughtful man than Kirk Douglas would have us believe. I would also like to thank everyone who worked on the project. I also want to thank the staff at Mickey for all their support, and Sjarel Ex and his staff at the Centraal Museum. And I want to thank Erna Donkers and Frits Becht from the Van Gogh '90 Foundation for their support.

Finally, the story of Vincent is a story which involves almost everyone like a fairy tale that has been handed down from mother to child. Like most fairy tales it's as much about the present as it is about the past. ANALYZE LOVERS is as much our story as it is the story of Vincent.

Les Levine, April 1990

Newport

Stripes

Menthol

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Newport

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88

Ritsaert ten Cate

A text for Les Levine

Bright yellow paper, graphic lines, a ground plan: within the contours of a space, arrangements of space. Huge plastic modular shapes grouped by a choice of people, among others a dancer, a television director, an art critic, a fashion designer. Sixty acrylic domes are placed in space as designated. Arrangements carry the suggestion that echoes the craft of their executor, or perhaps it's safer to assume that they express his or her personality. They are signed by Les Levine. The series was exhibited as a part of an installation in a gallery in Loenersloot: low-strung thin wires hum softly and are called Electric Shock; heaps of vacuum pressed and colorfully elegant thin plastic forms are called Disposables. It is an art show. Memorising a future. The year is 1967.

This kind of statement remains typical for the bright-eyed man I picked up at Schiphol. On the way to the Loenersloot gallery he treats me to a blizzard of questions about Holland and its inhabitants, about numbers, sizes, shapes, types: anything that might be recalled from an encyclopedic memory for later reference. Eventually a game called Trivial Pursuit will be marketed officially, but well before then Les, the media artist, was busy calling our trivial pursuits to our attention. Not numbered, but signed: '69 Levine, those pieces in Loenersloot worked with a mildly mocking undertone.

Later I was sitting in his studio, somewhere on the Bowery in New York, and I remember feeling that I could drown in his gushing ideas and images. It was a torrent of concepts that turned my world upside down. These memories are consistent with my experience of his work as I would later run to see it: Nixon in China, long before it became an opera, as an installation which gave graphic weight to world politics. Or the breathtaking simplicity of billboard messages which were more than only larger than life. Feed Greed. Or poster campaigns in New York's subway system: another kind of graffiti which functioned as an infiltration, rather than an attack.

When Van Gogh's sunflowers broke all sales records at Sotheby's and started to reverberate through the world I thought the time had come perhaps for another 'Levine comment'. Both on Van Gogh's meaning today, and on the events which were to take place in the Van Gogh year. That memory is juxtaposed against another one, more recent: Les in the Van Gogh Museum, excitedly pulling me towards some of Van Gogh's later works, and lecturing me severely on the miracles that he established on canvas with a brush. He pointed out the breathtaking simplicity of the final statement, the rare art expressed in a series of coldly planned, precisely executed and, finally, musical strokes. He showed me that Van Gogh's work suggested orchestral crescendos, rather than the mad cacophony of sounds around a myth of madness.

It is correct, now, to find Les in a medieval chapel filled with relics of present time by a media artist who speaks the language of the times. Potato Harvesters: in 13 billboards and a television programme. He expresses precision, even with that mild look of humorous astonishment, and uses his statements as a scalpel. Analyze Lovers. Another kind of celebration, touching time. Guard this object. We will. We are.

Ritsaert ten Cate is artistic director of Micky.

NOTE OF AGREEMENT

THE PURCHASER OF this note agrees to complete the following before December 31, 1969.

1. TO TRAVEL at his own expense on any regularly scheduled airline from London to DELM
2. TO TAKE twenty photographs as a record while in DELM
3. TO RETURN to London from DELM within twenty four hours of arrival
4. TO POST the above-mentioned photographs to:
LES LEVINE,
119 BOWERY,
NEW YORK CITY,
N.Y.,
U.S.A.

LES LEVINE will sign and return the photographs, mounted by him on a certificate of authentication. It is understood that LES LEVINE will, his schedule allowing, be willing to accompany and document the PURCHASER on his trip. The fee for such a service would be \$ 1,000.00 U.S.

PURCHASER
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LES LEVINE
(Signed)

les 69

A Space With A Language To Exist In

An interview of Les Levine

by Marja Bosma

MB: Why a project on Van Gogh?

LL: I wanted to make a kind of video opera for some time. When I was asked to put a proposal together for a Van Gogh-project, I almost immediately decided that this would be a suitable form.

MB: So you already had the form in outline; how did you develop your ideas about Van Gogh?

LL: I tried to remember what I could of Vincent just superficially and I remembered the painting The Potato Harvesters. Then I went to try and find a reproduction of it, which is very hard because apparently I was the only person in the world who would remember this one.

MB: Why did you choose this painting?

LL: Well, first of all for practical reasons: it was an exact billboard format. In other words, I did not have to change anything in the painting to turn it into a billboard. To approach anything from a purely simplistic, technical reason is as good a way as any. It also struck me as though it could have the potency of Vincent without Vincent being there. These people working in the fields: there seemed to be an implication of human concern in his early work. Then it occurred to me in looking at this painting that it was like a hole in the ground; one could look at this and say "hey this has just been dug up! We dug a hole in the ground and we found this so let's go to everybody who possibly

could have a point of view about this and see if we could find out the meaning of this." So it's like an archeological dig, metaphorically speaking.

MB: You mean, you use the painting of Van Gogh as a kind of archeological site?

LL: It's like one looks at the painting as though it were a hole in the ground. Around this hole there are standing an undertaker, a sociologist, an economist, an art historian, a man who actually digs the hole in the ground and they are all trying to figure out "what is the meaning of this hole?" That's how the project started. So it's essentially like an excavation, and that particular painting The Potato Harvesters seemed perfect because it was in the right format, it was about issues which are predominantly strong in the history of Vincent (although not predominantly strong in his art). I'm primarily a media-artist, I'm always more interested in the way a thing appears and what it seems to be rather than what it really is. In other words, I don't know the painting, I've never seen it, and I don't really want arthistorical views of it. I would much prefer views based on its residue.

MB: You're not interested in what Van Gogh himself thought about this work?

LL: You *know* the painting is a metaphor for Vincent's body - what else is any painting except a metaphor for the artist's body? -; but in this case I chose to see it as

GUARD THIS OBJECT



POSITION REGRET



another metaphor: I'm on a journey to find my own relationship to the meaning of making art at this moment in time. I've used this metaphor to do that. This is not about Vincent, this is about all of us and how we see this thing. It's no different to me than when I first heard about James Dean. The metaphor in the ending myth was extraordinary but when I saw him acting I thought he was a second-rate Marlon Brando. I didn't think he was a great actor and I'm not even sure that I liked his myth all that much, but it's the mythmaking and the metaphors, the unreality and the quality of fiction that media bring to everything that interest me ...

MB: Let's talk about the video part of the installation. You interviewed people from various backgrounds and professions. What issues concerning Van Gogh or the Van Gogh-myth did you raise?

LL: I wanted to ask them whether they thought it would be okay to starve in the way an artist starved who produced something beautiful that looks like nature. I wanted to ask them what they thought about that as an ideal. I wanted to ask the art historians why Vincent should be taken to be the highest priced artist and if this means anything. I wanted to ask the auctioneers similar questions but I was also interested in asking them why art has become so much a metaphor for inflationary values in our time, more than anything, more than stocks, more than real-estate, more than gold; it has outdone them all. Intrinsically there is something within me that says "hey that's not a good idea"; it strikes me to say that if you make art you have to perform like a commodity. In the same time it seems to me

that it would be very hard to imagine that we could ever approach art from the point of view of, let's say, seeing it as a spiritual thing any more; I think that has been wiped out entirely. Now it's just something for companies to trade in. I hope this observation doesn't imply that I'm a cynic, because in fact art is very important to me, and so I feel that when people tread on art, they kind of tread on me a bit. So, in a sense, I hope that by doing this project somebody would not say to me, "oh the money doesn't matter", because that's childish, it does matter. But I hope that somebody would say, "yes that is happening now, but another thing or something different will happen at another time". In the long run the project is not about the money for the Van Gogh, the piece is really about "the story of Vincent van Gogh", which means our story. The story of our time in relationship to him, the story of the people who are now experts in his field or experts in the exchange of his art. In other words, it's our story, the story we can know through media, the story we can know because we have been influenced by his story.

MB: "The story of Vincent van Gogh", isn't that in some way the story that he wrote himself, in his letters?

LL: Vincent from what I can see was pretty good at script-writing; he wrote himself as a pretty interesting character.

MB: Do you really think he planned that?

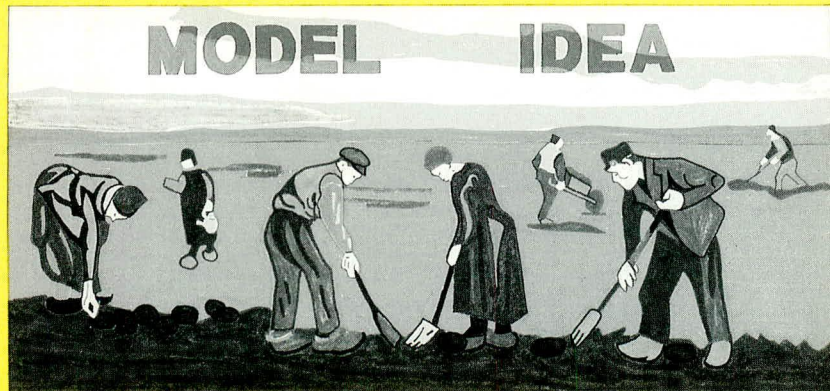
LL: Well, he didn't probably produce an awful lot of letters that had a considerable amount of obscenities in them, I'm sure, but I don't think he had written such,



how can we put it, sanitized letters, cleaned up letters either. But that isn't even the point. He seemed to be the art director's perfect idea of an artist. The whole myth that has been built up around him is extraordinarily questionable: he couldn't have been a poor man, for instance; you can't produce seven hundred paintings in less than ten years and be a poor man, it's not possible even in his days and age. It wasn't exactly as though Theo supported him like loving brother, because he always took the paintings as if to say "I give you the money but you give me the paintings". So he always accumulated, it was always like - "you work for me". Not unlike what is in common amongst art dealers anyway. Theo never seemed to express any idea that these paintings were of much interest or much value. So there are many things about Vincent that are questionable in terms of his history. I looked at his painting called the Starry Night, which is a wonderful painting. When you see the progression of brush strokes, and the precision of how these are done and put together, you see that this is not an agitated mad man painting, this is not an unstable character; this is almost a person in a supreme state of equilibrium. A mad man can not do that. Physically you would not be able to get it right. All of a sudden when you see the painting in reality you know these things.

MB: Do you think Vincent believed in his own myth?

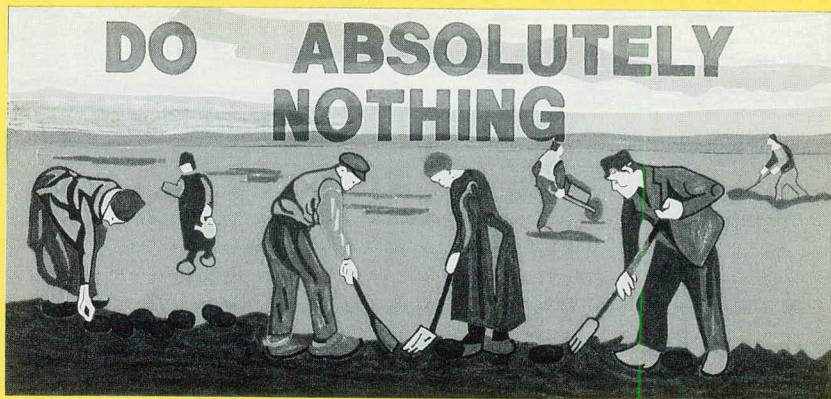
LL: He understood that he had to make a myth, he understood that it was entirely necessary to do that and not to leave it just to chance; to make sure that he produced all that information by himself and that every-





DESIRE

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DO ABSOLUTELY
NOTHING

body saw the letters. Then people have a superstitious view which is to think that when the artist has said something, it is more true than anything anybody else can say about that artist's work. That artists can be wonderful at making paintings but intellectually at a very mediocre level is nothing bad to say, because after all their thing is to make the painting. The explanation of the painting by them sometimes is quite inadequate.

MB: Are explanations necessary, or in other words, can a painting be something in itself?

LL: Yes, absolutely, in and of itself, it's a corpus delicti. You can certainly look at this dead body and examine the nature of the body with full breath in it.

MB: What is the use of staring at a "corpus delicti"/ looking at a work of art?

LL: I think that most myths that guide us through our lives are invented for us in childhood and we become more or less intellectually sophisticated based on our ability to overcome the images that controlled us as children. Finally a work of art is a metaphor for the world, for the way the world can be seen, for how you find yourself in it and what you can do in relationship to it. But more than anything else a work of art is permission to be what you see. To participate in the vision that is presented. Even more than that, one can say that a work of art could have almost a spiritual value: it could give you the impression that life is worth living. Of course it also implies what kind of life is worth living, because art is a particular thing. What is good about good art is its particularity, its specificity; a good work of art is a compendium of specifics. It keeps telling you



where you should be going, it keeps telling you in what direction you should be looking, in which areas you should not be looking and what attitude you should be avoiding. It is respecting the conditions all the time if it's a good work.

Finally one could probably say that Vincent's work is not so good after all, although he produced some great works; because the metaphor that he presents in most of his work is a very high rating metaphor, to use a mass media term. It is a metaphor which implies that there should be more situation comedies on television than high grade discussions, it is a metaphor which would rate, let's say, soap-operas over real operas. Vincent seems to appeal to the lowest common denominator. He is not a sophisticated artist by any means, his taste seems to be very simplistic: landscapes. He was primarily a landscape-painter. All landscapes are metaphors for a concept of heaven and all portraits are concepts of God.

MB: Heavenly in concept maybe, but I just can't believe that people in his day really liked his paintings. They're not very lovable to look at.

LL: No, they *are* lovable to look at, because they have this baby quality to them. They have strong colours and in certain cases they look like as if a sophisticated child has done them. But I can't make any judgements on his art; I didn't come to the project to evaluate his art, because that would be pointless. I came to it to evaluate our relationship to art in general; to see if this can not be a metaphor for how we are in relationship to art. What could we as a group, as a society accept as art in this moment of time? In the long run maybe it doesn't



matter, because I find so many people so willing to accept the status quo, that I almost feel a little awkward. I feel like I'm the fool because I'm asking the questions.

MB: By the status quo you mean that the values of art are exchanged for money values. Don't you think that it were the art historians who created the values (of art) in the first place?

LL: I think the auctioneers have taken over from the art historians. The traders were not happy with the way that art historians were moving on this issue. So they decided to put their faith in the auctioneers. It's almost like instead of going to your priest to ask him about a question of spirituality, you go to your caterer. You will go to your hot-dog salesman and ask him if he can give you some spiritual advice. In other words, one cannot see this in relationship to its arthistorical importance anymore. Perhaps the whole work that I'm doing here has to do with trying to find within this work some notion of what a self-respecting artist could be in this moment in time.

I'm confused about it emotionally, because I'm not sure whether it matters nowadays that anybody is an artist.

MB: Methodically or stylistically your work shows affinities with advertisement.

LL: I straddle the world of advertising and art; at some degree I'm more of an advertiser than I am an artist. One of the reasons one gets involved with advertisement in the first place, is because advertisement has been so effective. This is an advertising age. It seems to me that every artist would want to use the media which seem to be the most effective for the lives of



people of his time. Good advertising gets its message across to everybody in a very direct, simple way. And I like to keep it simple and direct. But you have to understand that the kind of language I use is unlike the use of language in advertising. My language is not narrative, not novelistic, it is not a description of an event and it is not involved with analysis. What it is involved with, is episodic, emotional changes of time and language. First of all: most things that I write are not sentences at all. The non-sentences are all command-like, because they are imperatives. I use the mode of imperative command to generate an almost psychotic state in language, which doesn't define its meaning as much as it defines your emotional relationship to it.

Second, what's important is that my language moves backward and forwards in time, as it were. I'm trying to find a space with a language to exist in: not real space, but a space/time that the viewers sense themselves to be in at the moment they are watching. The time that exists in my work is the time between the piece and the viewer, which is an unknown time.

I intend not to use a language which is worldly, political, educational or academic. I intend to take language which seems very personal. Because one of the things that I think art can do is take experiences out of the realm of the esoteric and place them in the exoteric. In other words: take them out of the realm of being issues, into simply things that you feel. When you hear issues on television, you don't *feel* them, you *know* about them and can think about them. But it's a lot different when you actually feel something personally. That's one thing art can do: it can make you think that this is a more personal event.

MB: What is the relationship between your use of language and that of images? Do you consider the image of secondary importance?

LL: Ideally it's the equilibrium that you're seeking. My work is not simply about what language says. The image makes you modify what the language appears to say and v.v.; in a sense the two are scrambled. But I don't think that images as such, in itself, have very much power anymore. I think that we have passed the state of the power of images and that now, because of computers, fax machines and many other electronic ways of communicating, words are going to be considered as the basic and dominating force of our culture. Even that is translated into the value of a Van Gogh painting. Because underlying the value is the idea that his work is something from the past; it can never be done again. As time goes on people will find the necessity for more words, there is no end to explanations and interpretations.

By bringing the image and the words together they seem to modify each other, there is a pulling going on, so that you're left with the idea that what you're experiencing is not what you thought you saw or what you thought it was. More than anything I want the viewers to *feel*; that this piece is for *them*. No one else at all. This is for you. Not for everybody. When you look at the work, you should think: he means me!

Marja Bosma is staff member of the Centraal Museum.



ANALYZE LOVERS

The story of Vincent

Produced and directed by Les Levine

CATHERINE GALASSO
Child

SCENE 1



- This is the story of Vincent van Gogh. Here is Vincent van Gogh. Here is Paul Gauguin.
- He found out that he wasn't very good being a preacher so he decided to paint pictures of the poor people. He thought that that would help. He called over his friend, Paul Gauguin. So, Paul Gauguin came over and they painted lovely pictures together.
- Here comes Vincent running toward Paul with a knife in his hand Paul makes a sudden move and Vincent stops and goes back home and he cuts off his ear.
- He puts his ear in an envelope and gives it to a lady and he says "guard this object carefully".
- He also painted a picture of himself with a bandage around his ear.



SCENE 2

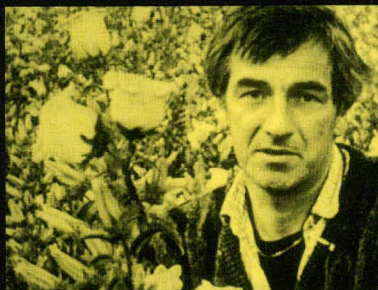
VINCENT VAN GOGH

- I had a feeling for the suffering of other people. I wanted to be in the ministry myself. Though I remember as a young man having great doubts about **some of the doctrines**.

SCENE 3

KEES VAN AMSTERDAM

Flower grower, Lisse



- **Vincent** was a famous painter. He painted nature, he painted flowers... He painted irises, sunflowers. He painted the poor man on the street. He was also himself a **very poor man**.
- **This gives me** a sort of connection with Vincent. He also liked flowers and I like flowers **in my way**.

SCENE 4

VINCENT VAN GOGH

- **I have sometimes** a great deal of difficulty expressing myself so sermons and little things that ministers are called on to do were very difficult for me.
But it became clear to me that the poverty was so deep and so widespread and suffering that one man was almost powerless to do **anything about it**.

JAN FABRE

Theater Director, Artist, Antwerpen



- **The morning after** of the rock and roll of Vincent van Gogh.
- **For me there** was also for example, the new emotional painting it was almost like after the conceptuels, let us say, the dealers, or the buyers need something back to hang on their walls, something with pictures. It was also like out of a necessity for the art dealers and the galleries to create that kind of art. And I think it's happening quicker and quicker I think.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 6

- **I sometimes feel** that some of the problems that we have is that we are divorced from the physical, from nature, from having a real contact with God's world.
And you see that. I saw that when I was working with the peasants and I tried to get that feeling across in "The potato eaters" painting and other paintings of **that period**.

SCENE 7

ALANNA HEISS

Museum Director, P.S. 1, New York



• I have my imaginative idea about what Van Gogh would do and I think he'd probably wander in and probably be disruptive in the office and possibly insult people in the front office and I have a terrible fear that we wouldn't give him a show.

• Seemed extraordinarily genuine in his disarray. His disarray seemed to be caused by emotional and emotive concerns and the work apparently appears to be a result from that and we don't see so much of that.

Now we see a lot of art which is the result of rational analyzation of concerns as opposed to immediate reaction. The dealers and the museums frequently judge on the basis of that. They don't want to see sloppy art, messy art, un-thought-out art, art which is not in some way constructed towards theories which we feel to be valid.

• Certainly it would be nice to think of Mr. van Gogh with a helicopter because the vision of the work that might come from his trip from Manhattan to East Hampton by helicopter, as he went over the few remaining potato fields in East Hampton, and looked down on them might produce a whole series of works in the East Hampton barn which is adjacent to his 30 room mansion in East Hampton.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 8

- I could perhaps make paintings that would be sympathetic to poor people, of all people. But they themselves, for whatever reason, probably wouldn't ever understand them. That was very difficult for me to deal with.

JAN VAN VLIJMEN
Composer, Amsterdam

SCENE 9



• There was a very strong relationship between Vincent and Theo. Not only because of the fact that Theo paid him and sent him the money for him to work, to eat, and everything, but there was a very symbiotic relationship between Theo and Vincent. It was a very critical moment in Theo's life the moment that he decided to marry a woman.

• From the moment he married Johanna Bonger that was the name of his wife, from that moment, he was hesitating all the time. What shall I do? Shall I put all my attentions to my wife? Or to my brother? That's also the basic element of the drama – that he has to choose. But he cannot choose.

• Our theory is that he took over all the qualities of his brother. He became in fact, step by step, Vincent. He wanted to be a painter.

SCENE 10

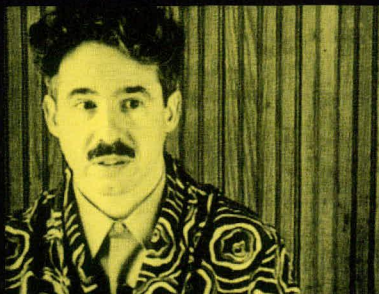
VINCENT VAN GOGH

- **Without Theo**, I don't think I could have kept on going. Even though we were not together all the time, we kept in touch. It was basically through Theo that I began to meet other artists that, at least, had some **similar ideas to mine**.

SCENE 11

JEFF WEINSTEIN

Senior editor, *The Village Voice*, New York



- **In fact**, when you look at the work, the first thing you think about is money and that is, I guess, what I most dislike. It must be a very powerful artwork that would have you think about something other than its cost.
- **It's very easy** to read some of Van Gogh's paintings as records of his emotional torture. But, if you didn't know, if you knew, if Van Gogh's life looked to you, if Van Gogh had lived a bourgeois life and you looked at the work, you could easily interpret the work as a reflection of that life as well. I'm afraid that biography does not always help for you to **understand the work**.
- **And what could** be more of an outsider that to have a brother who is an art dealer who couldn't sell this own brother's work? He must have hated himself in some way. Or felt as if people **must have hated him**.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 12

- **I always had** great affection for Gauguin, which is probably difficult for people to understand. It may have been why we had so many disagreements. But he was more than a brother to me. In a way, he was the kind of brother that Theo wasn't. He had a passion for art that I don't think Theo ever had. Of course, Theo was **not an artist himself**.

DRS. J.W. JANSSEN

Banker, Utrecht



SCENE 13

- **It was going up** at Christie's, at Sotheby's, at Philip's, at all the auctions, etcetera, etcetera. I must agree the toppest were rising to the utmost and especially the last years when the Japanese came in, and when the international jet set came in. **And that was it**.
- **Alan Bond** in Australia who buys for more than 100 million guilders, Van Gogh. And Sotheby's who is lending the money, half of the money of it. That is a strange and fearful affair that goes a bit in the direction of 1929 Wall Street **in the States**.
- **The age of money** you can make persons, you can make painters. You can make bankers. You can make everyone if you like. If you **have money and power**.

- **Investing in art** is in addition to the traditional ways of investing. That is to me absolutely clear that it is an acceptable and interesting and worthwhile way of **investing money**.

SCENE 14

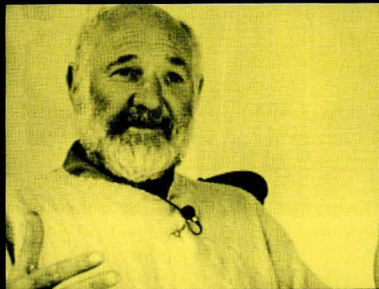
VINCENT VAN GOGH

- **When you feel this light** pouring through you, nothing else seems to matter. I'm sure I made many mistakes and that light pouring through you. You have no real preparation. The only preparation you have is the stupid protestant church can dislocate you, disturb you, **make you out of harmony**.

SCENE 15

MALCOLM MORLEY

Artist, New York



- **And he's every** non-artist person's idea of what an artist looks like. In terms of whether the suffering was outside or inside he certainly walked around with bits of bread and flasks of brandy and didn't eat very well. And he had evidently, they say, some kind of epileptic, rather the idea of, quote, being mad artist. He was simply a man who had epilepsy that in modern medicine would be able to **take a pill**.
- **I mean, when** you start thinking about it, he used to make reed

pen drawings for every painting, working out the position of each brushstroke. They were conceptual on that level and the introduction to really psychedelic colors.

I think you could say that Vincent introduced psychedelic colors into painting. And psychedelic really from the idea of, for example, when you hit your eye very hard, by accident, you see stars. The kind of ...poof! Well, "starry, starry night"! Every time you bang your head, **you get "starry, starry night"**.

- **There's another story**, a letter, written this time by a man who was alive at least 10 years ago, who confessed shamefully that as a child, he, with other boys, used to throw stones at this man. Who looked to them like a very strange figure, carrying 5 canvasses on his back, with his paint, chewing a piece of bread, a flask of brandy sticking out. That certainly is a **christlike format**.

- **And everybody could** feel great about him and the work because its worth, according to whatever millions of dollars, and the man suffered terribly. So it really is redemption. I mean, it truly is the Christ redemption.

Not only is it Christ crucified, but it's Christ redeemed forever and ever. And you could really say you have christianity in Goghism. It's an equal religion all on its own. It has all the ingredients of what we need in a religion. Redemption. **He's in painters' heaven**.

- **I mean, then**, I think maybe it was a calling. Now it's a profession, and it was his second calling, was it not? I mean, the first calling was to the church. **They threw him out**.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 16

- **But the looking was** always in terms of the painting and the painting would increase those feelings. They fit each other somewhat. So I don't see on one side there's nature and on the other side I make a painting. To me, at that moment it was together. I saw nature through the painting. I saw painting, the paintings I wanted to make (I think I mostly **failed**) **through nature**.

SCENE 17

RUDI FUCHS

Director, Gemeentemuseum, Den Haag



- **There is a kind of tendency to make him into a kind of tragic person who never sold a painting and who was very poor and whose family cared for him. That's very important that the family cared for him all the time. In fact, he was thrown out of his house by his father, more or less.**

His brother cared for him in a very ambiguous way. Because, at the same time, he was **taking the pictures**.

- **I mean, when I read the letters, I don't find him particularly sympathetic. I think he's a pretty unbearable kind of person. He's a real pain in the ass. And it's interesting his brother put up with this idiot in a way.**

I mean, I don't really like him as a person. Reading the letters I think he's really unsupportable. **You know, a whining...**

- **I'm not quite sure** Theo understood the paintings. I'm not quite sure that Theo liked them. But anyway, if he had sold them, things would have been completely different because then he would have given money to his brother. Then the fact only was, the only funny or interesting thing is that his dealer was his brother **which is really not the case**.

- **But I don't know** what goes on in the mind of a very rich person who buys a Van Gogh and it hangs there in his house. It's

some kind of perversion that you have this painting which costs you 50 million dollars and this was painted by this poor dutch half-wit, no, not half-wit, but schizophrenic whose letters we can read and we can actually almost talk to him.

And then, the owner would open the letter and there you could read how miserable he was and still **there is the painting**.

- **And the painting costs 40 million dollars.** That's so far away that it's already in heaven, so to speak, **or in hell**.

- **Auctioning paintings is a great way of laundering your money.** I mean, you buy a painting and you keep it. You auction it off after 10 years and **there it is**.

- **I can probably** look at the painting by Van Gogh without remembering that it is 40 million dollars. I think many, many people who go to these exhibitions can't forget that. **That's why they go**.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 18

- **I felt a failure** even though I knew the paintings were what I wanted them to be. They were different from anybody else's paintings. They were saying what I wanted them to say or what needed to be said, through me. I felt a failure **at the same time**.

KHEMPO PALDEN SHERAB

Tibetan Lama, New York



SCENE 19

- So many, many, different ways in which flowers are very special. This artist who painted art or flowers has special significance which is his love and compassion, how he cares for all the sentient beings or others by his love and compassion. Therefore, I think there must be some connection between that representation of his intention and his love and kindness **thought for others.**

- **Whether you keep** the dollar or, from Buddhist point of view, you should not cling too much to that. Whether you keep that art also we should not cling too much to art. Just keep it as like your mirror, as your reflection, as a moon in the water. And then, as illusions. Both see the dollar as illusion or the picture as illusion. Illusion is with you, the illusion person. Illusion person sees entire, everything is just that way. And buying or selling things, I think, is o.k.

- **So, therefore, that art** which I am doing, I am going to paint more peace, harmony, and wisdom, more clarity, and less ignorance, less grasping, less jealous, and anger activities. And that's the really first thing. In Buddhism, that's called Bodhicitta. So really be based in Bodhicitta and then **perform the art.**

SCENE 20

VINCENT VAN GOGH

- **I don't see just a tree,** I see like it's the burning bush from the old testament. I see God's voice. I **see everything alive.**

JOYCE POMEROY SCHWARTZ Public Art Consultant, New York



SCENE 21

- **I think if** he only did things like "the Potato Eaters" he probably wouldn't be as popular as **he is now.**
- **All these people** who are spending that kind of money are taking the art away from the people and we **can't let that happen.**
- **And I know that** there were some people who did pay an astronomical amount of money for a living artist that was way overboard but they had several others of the artist. So that in a funny way, if they just sold two or three of the other paintings, they would make back that because they had increased the market value.
And there are few people but a sufficient number of them to kind of fuel this money game.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 22

- **A lot of my paintings** are failures. One of them for instance, is the "Irises" painting.
What I wanted to do there was to get the feeling of night during the day, putting those kind of opposites together, and a certain feeling for the land.
And it just didn't work. **It didn't work at all.**

SCENE 23

JULIAN SCHNABEL

Artist, New York



• Well, I think that if Vincent van Gogh were painting today, painting paintings like that, that he would not sell 2 paintings. I think that if he was working at this point in time, there would be an audience for his work, or more of an audience for his work. Because there are a lot of painters who can't hold a candle to him that are doing fine.

• You stick a little Van Gogh painting in a room and you can have Monets and you can have all sorts of different things and they just all disappear. This thing is charged with intensity and a kind of clarity that I think is particular to these paintings. So the man that made these things is absolutely different from all other people. But at the same time, he's the same as all other people. And he's got the same needs. I mean, the painting doesn't care if you like it or not, but he might. So, he's a victim of the human condition as any of us are. You can be a baker and have the same problem.

• I mean, he was living in the world. And I think that he had all of the guilt and all of the normal impulses and aspirations of any brother who borrowed money from his brother and felt like he was living off his brother. And he needed to pay it off.

• When anybody has problems, I would say bring in the parents for questioning.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 24

• About the sunflowers. I really did hope that they would be more successful than my other paintings in that you could sell some of them. I think at that point I was beginning to feel guilty. Always asking Theo for money. Theo always sending me money. Never having quite enough money myself, just barely enough for supplies. And I thought I was owing so much to Theo that if these paintings could finally sell, I'll say it, I would be free of him.

MICHAEL A. FINDLAY
Vice president, Christie's

SCENE 25



• All of this basically is because of the initial sale of the "Sunflowers". As I said, had it been a Tahitian Gauguin, I'm sure it would have gone for the same price – 40 or 50 million dollars. And that would have produced other ones coming on to the market.

- **I mean**, it's basically a one line life. Misunderstood, tortured genius, only sold one painting, cuts his ear, shoots himself, dies penniless and, gee whiz! Look, now, they're selling for 50 million dollars. What irony.

So there you have basically a cartoon hero that fascinates everybody. The problem is when they're looking at "Starry Night" what are they seeing? When they're looking at the wheat fields and the crows, what are they seeing? The myth? Money? Or are they looking **at the painting**.

- **When he met** Gachet who was a doctor and a painter, he said, "This man looks like me." He even said, "This man feels like me." He said, "This man is as sick as I am." He said "This man is supposed to look after me but he has problems." And he identified on many levels with this very very **bizarre character**.

- **The art market** like any other market is cyclical. It tends to fall behind economic trends by a matter of months or years. So there's always a time when the economy appears to be doing poorly and the art market is doing apparently very well. It usually means the art market hasn't quite caught up with, and is about to **crash once again**.

SCENE 26

VINCENT VAN GOGH

- **And then if** they had sold, I would have escaped from this horrible feeling of dependency on Theo. Theo, the good son. Me, the bad son.

MONSIGNOR EUGENE CLARK

St. Agnes' church, New York



SCENE 27

- **You can be** an artist and succeed in life without much spirituality. But to be a great artist, universal, and universal down the ages as well as broadly speaking, you must have some spiritual conviction which leads to a certain artistic passion to say I'm attempting to portray, to communicate something that's far beyond me. And then attempting to remind us not just of the glory of creation but of the powerful fact of creation that this is being offered to us. And it's well beyond what human beings could produce. The simple flower. Really saying what a glorious thing - not because it's pretty. But because it's glorious and it's from the hand of the creator. I think he was pursuing that spiritual thought. That's my own perception, excuse me, of course, there's much more to him. His portraits of people are much more sophisticated and complicated. But again there's a certain love of the individual. And he's trying to find the essence of that individual which is a high spiritual communication of really one soul pursuing another to see what's there.

SCENE 28

VINCENT VAN GOGH

- **I cut my ear off.** I gave it to her. I had to. I had to do something real. "Here, take my body." You don't want my paintings. Take my body. And guard it so **you'll remember.**

SCENE 29

GRACE GLUECK

Art editor, *The New York Times*, New York



- **He was one** of your basic, you know, he was one, one of your basic crazy artists, that I think people caught on to. They love that legend of poor Van Gogh going crazy in the asylum at St. Remy and then cutting off his ear and then finally committing suicide. It's very romantic. It suits people's idea of a **romantic artist's life.**
- **Look at the** legend of Christianity. That has tremendous appeal and I think the whole idea of somebody suffering - but there always has to be a benefit to mankind involved. It always has to be a good kind of suffering. And I think this is the way it certainly came out with Van Gogh. There is a certain vicarious element in that, too. In other words, let others do our **suffering for us.**
- **He couldn't remain** undiscovered today because today no artist goes undiscovered. So he would have to be discovered pretty early and he'd probably become fairly insufferable. Yes. Instead of

suffering he **would become insufferable.**

- **Money does change** things. I think it distances people from each other. I think it creates very destructive competition among people. I think it **changes their values.**
- **A collector once** said to me, who had a Picasso hanging on his wall, he said, "Do you realize that's \$ 300,000 interest a year that I have up there?" And I think that's really terrible to hear people talk about art as if it was expected to perform for them in some way, like a stock, is just the worst thing. It's the worst fate that could befall art really. So in that way our feelings and attitudes about it have **changed I think.**

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 30

- **It may have** been a way of making an image that I certainly hadn't planned to do that. I mean I would rather be remembered for my paintings than cutting off **my stupid ear.**

RICHARD FEIGEN

Art dealer, New York



SCENE 31

- **The auction houses** start to present themselves as financial institutions. They start printing material that presents them as purveyors of financial services. And they publicize every price of every picture that breaks a record. They don't do much publicizing of things that fail. But mainly the things that succeed, being at this point still an unregulated business, they're not forced by any governmental agency to be straightforward about these things as with the stock market or **the bond market**.

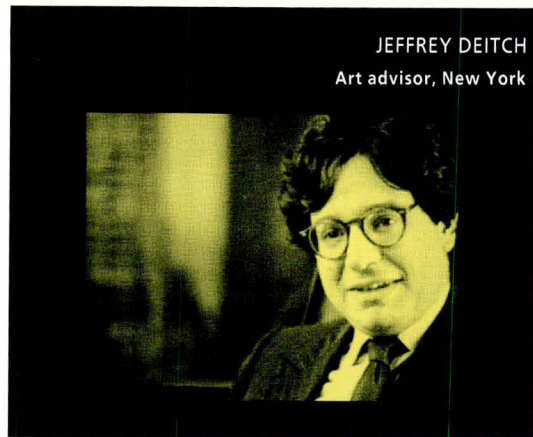
- **So you have** this great artist, nobody doubts his greatness, an artist who has been gathered up into the arms of the youngest generation of neo-expressionists as their legitimate ancestor, an artist who patently influenced every subjectivist in the 20th century, having been exposed in Berlin at the Kacere Gallery and so on early in the century. He was clearly a great influence. And you have all this money out there looking for a place to park. And the more expensive the painting, the more interesting it is as a parking lot for a large sum of money. These people are looking to park big sums of money. So obviously, Van Gogh is **the logical candidate**.

SCENE 32

VINCENT VAN GOGH

- **I thought maybe** if I cut off my ear, gave it to her, she would understand the kinds of feelings I had for her. I don't **think she did**.

JEFFREY DEITCH
Art advisor, New York



SCENE 33

- **Certainly in the** past 10 years there's been a mania for Van Gogh. It's supported by what we've seen in the art, particularly in the art of the early 80's as well as in the Van Gogh exhibition industry. And then of course we come to these extraordinary market prices. And Van Gogh has come to symbolize with the 50 million dollar price tags. The outsider, the outcast, who does his own thing even while he's rejected, but ultimately is rewarded by society, that ultimately he wins. That all the people who rejected him, refused to look at his work, treated him like a fool, even they would be impressed by the 50 million dollars that a painting of his would **go for today**.

- **These price tags** bring a new layer of abstraction to our comprehension of the work. And 50 million dollars means a lot more than any of these aesthetic issues **to most people**.

- **There's no question** that Kirk Douglas should be getting a commission on every Van Gogh sale at auction. That was an extraordinary portrayal **in the film**.

- **You know, one** always wonders, one has this poetic idea, were there other people in the history of art with the kind of talent of Van Gogh who actually made great paintings like that? But who didn't have a brother who was an art dealer and so on. And, in

fact, who just expired in some insane asylum someplace and the orderlies just threw the pictures away.

SCENE 34

VINCENT VAN GOGH

- I think Theo was in some ways kind of an art critic. And I always read very carefully what he wrote to me and listened to what he said. But I think he was often very wrong. But that was another world to me, the world of Paris. I had no real connection to that world except through Theo.

SCENE 35

TONY RILEY

Economist, A. Gary Schilling & Co., Inc., New York



- I think the danger is that you have a situation where because of the slowing inflation, in other words, the lack of appreciation in tangible assets over the next few years may have been oversold. So there may be something of a crash in the art market as demand fails to grow at the same rate as it has been. People get disillusioned and therefore withdraw from the market.
- In the art market someone has to decide where the line is between good art and bad art. And it's no longer going to be an

aesthetic line. It's going to be a "how's it going to appreciate?" line.

- The reason that so much was paid for the *Iris*es was the fact that Sotheby's was out there lending the money, which, as I understand it, is a reasonably new development. Now, the experience of the last few years in the U.S. economy has shown that if you're willing to lend money, you can massively over-inflate the value of almost any asset.
- If lending standards tighten, then things that you can buy on borrowed money are not worth as much as they used to be. Now, as I understand it, the purchaser of the *Iris*es wasn't able to meet his repayments which probably scared the pants off Sotheby's. And I'm sure will have some influence on whether they're willing to loan in quite the same manner for the next one that comes on the block.
- When the insiders start to sell, sell with them. Because, what will happen, if the market is like most markets, the people who really know what they're doing, who are in tune with both the financial and the artistic pulse will realize, will see what's coming before anyone else. And they will, ever so discreetly if they can, to avoid undermining the price of the rest of their stock, the price of their holdings, will start to get out. The people who only read about it in the *Wall Street Journal* or 'the Art Gazette' will be left holding the baby. They will want to sell when everyone who's gonna buy has bought. So you'll have a lot of sellers and few buyers. So if Saatchi sells, I'd sell. That's the way I'd see it.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

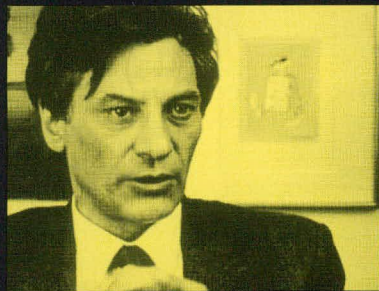
SCENE 36

- Some people have suggested that it might have been a mistake that someone would pay that much for a painting. I don't think that it was a mistake. I think it was a crime. 50 million dollars! That's an enormous amount of money for just a bunch of smears, just paint smeared on a canvas, when there's so much suffering in the world. I think it's a sin.

SCENE 37

JAN HOET

Director, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Gent



So it was always a little disturbing in the fact that people are dealing with Van Gogh in the marginal psychological way. For example, they were always telling you he was crazy. And because he was crazy, they like the paintings. I think maybe his body was crazy. I think there is a new version today. To think that his body was very weak and not strong enough to follow his spiritual talent. I think spiritual. Van Gogh was a man with vision. He knew everything about industrial development. He knew everything about the necessity of color, the necessity to be **direct in painting**.

- **Because his paintings** came in advance to knowledge, to knowledge we now know after. I think art always should be in advance to knowledge. 700 paintings in 10 years! It's unbelievable. What intensity he could invest in 10 years. So people saw that. And then there is a collapse after 10 years. That's a terrible shock as is a **storm**.
- **The fool** had the position in the middle age as the advisor of the king. I see the artist in that role. A kind of a fool, who is judging the king, who has wisdom, wisdom enough. But maybe not accepted. The problem is there that there are no kings anymore who **accept the fool**.

- **Because you don't accept me**, I have the right to do as I like. And to be **totally alone**.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 38

- **I, Vincent**, born at a certain time, in a certain country, certain family, certain body, did all the things that I could do, that I was capable of doing. And there seemed no way, no reason to **go on**.

THOMAS McEVILLEY

Contributing editor, Art Forum, New York

SCENE 39



- **Modernist ideology** was an insane delusion. And the spirituality of it was like a vacancy to begin with. And, of course, the money, the enormous money. These are the two big boys when it comes to money. Obviously it has a lot to do with it because with this kind of romantic, heroic monstrosity, that the quality of aura becomes intensified to an enormous degree and the money in the art market is directly proportional to the quality of aura. And, of course, the old testament already shows this. There were certain prophesied events that the Christ had to undergo. You know, like entering Jerusalem on a white mule or whatever. Van Gogh's life had the marks, had those marks. It had

what was needed - the madness, the art, the death, the anguish, you know. The letters to Theo, that kind of corroborates that he was in on this. He knew about this scenario. He was complicit in it. In a sad way, he saw himself as belonging in it. So your question goes in various directions. Was he following the script? Or did the script take hold of him? And control him? Or was the script laid upon the record of his life afterwards? In one of these ways or another, the general features of his life seem to fit **the sacred script**.

- **That great line** in Ginsburg's poem that says, in the future the money will have Van Gogh's ear on it. And then at another moment in the same poem he cries out, "Death to Van Gogh's ear!" I mean that is an emblem of spiritual advancement and of money. So I guess that one has to finally say that in a large cultural sense, it's an emblem of falsity, of the conflation of **money and spirituality**.
- **So clearly, yes**, in this sense there were historical individuals from Van Gogh to Pollock, are hiddenly shaped by our cultural historiography on the myth **of the Messiah**.
- **And then the work** began increasingly to show this very exacerbated sense of spiritual exaltation culminating in the final painting of the crows rising above the wheat field. Which I take to signify the soul rising out of the **body at death**.
- **You see the late paintings** of Van Gogh as definitely participating in the abstract sublime in the sense that what he was trying to depict was this metaphysical glow. But this way of doing so was to approach it through this intensified perception of objects. Whereas, so it's not such a huge transition. You eliminate the object and you just attempt to paint that spiritual **exaltation by itself**.

VINCENT VAN GOGH

SCENE 40

- **When I was** there at Arles with Gauguin, we didn't need any money. It was in many ways really terrific. We had... wine was cheap. There were women there. We argued. We brawled. We didn't need the comforts of a middle class life. **This was freedom**.

CATHERINE GALASSO
Child

SCENE 41

- **This is the nurse** who drove the cab to the **hospital for Vincent**.
- **This is the handkerchief** with the blood on it that was left on the floor **from the ear**.
- **And this is Vincent** who cut **off his ear**.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS SINCE 1986

including exhibitions, urban projects and videos :

1986

Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana "Breathe Take Space"
Snug Harbor, Staten Island, N.Y.
The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, "Blame God"
Toronto, Canada "Media Mass (Local News)"
Carpenter & Hochman, N.Y. "Giant Computer Assisted Drawings"
Ted Greenwald Gallery, Video Gallery, N.Y. exhibition "3 by Les Levine"
Academie Der Kunst, Copenhagen "Friends" video installation
Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA
The Queens Museum, Queens, N.Y.

1987

Republic Bank Center, Houston, "Nixon Tries A New Course In China" from "The Last Book Of Life"
Zone, N.Y., "Sell Yourself" billboard at Ave B and Second St.
Elizabeth Galasso Fine Art, Ossining, "Advertise Yourself"

1988

Mai 36 Galerie, Luzern, "Media Projects and Public Advertisements"
Herron Gallery, Indianapolis, "Authentic Desire: Public Advertisements"
Espace FRAC, Dijon, "Consume or Perish", Indoor/Outdoor Billboard Exhibit
Muziektheater, Amsterdam, "Nixon Tries A New Course In China"
Symmetry '88, Middelburg, "The Cat Is On Her Shoulder"

1989

Billboard project in Cleveland in conjunction with Spaces Gallery, "Power Struggle"
Montreal Airport, Billboard project
Maison de la Culture, Chalons sur Saone, Billboard project
Art Frankfurt, Kunstmesse Frankfurt, "Brand New", Billboard project
International Center of Photography, N.Y., "Les Levine's Video: A Selection From Two Decades"
Galerie 1900-2000, La Galerie de Poche, Paris
New York Foundation for the Arts, New York Subways, "Consume or Perish" and "Pray for More"

1990

Gallery Montaigne, Paris
Mai 36 Galerie, Luzern
Centraal Museum, Utrecht, "Analyze Lovers"
Everson Museum, Syracuse, N.Y. Retrospective.

Work of Les Levine is represented in numerous public collections such as The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Corcoran Gallery, Washington D.C. and the National Gallery of Canada.

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Les Levine (Dublin 1935) lives and works in New York. His work has been involved with media since the late sixties. In 1970 he coined the term 'media art' to describe his work in the Software exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York. He has introduced the terms 'disposable art' and 'camera art'.

Colophon

ANALYZE LOVERS
The Story of Vincent

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED
by
LES LEVINE

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
MICKERY, AMSTERDAM

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by
MICHAEL GALASSO

THE PART OF VINCENT WAS PLAYED
by
JOHN PERREAULT

THE CHILD WAS PLAYED
by
CATHERINE GALASSO

WRITTEN
by
LES LEVINE

DIRECTOR OF VIDEOGRAPHY
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