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Van Gogh: Still Lifes

October 26, to February 2, 2020

Van Gogh: Still Lifes is the first systematic exploration of this important theme in the artist's work in an exhibition. Of the roughly 800 paintings that Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) created during his ten-year career as an artist, some 170—about a fifth—are still lifes. It is therefore all the more remarkable that there has never been a monographic exhibition dedicated to the genre of the still life in Van Gogh's work.

With exhibitions showcasing Henri-Edmond Cross and Pablo Picasso, the Museum Barberini launched a series dedicated to French modernist artists. Aspects of their work that have been neglected until now have been approached from new angles in international symposia held by the museum. In the autumn of 2019, the Museum Barberini will continue this series with the first exhibition of Vincent van Gogh's still lifes. The carefully chosen selection of 27 paintings traces the development of the artist's work from the earthy tones and simple everyday objects of the early paintings and the floral still lifes of his time in Paris to his radiant, exuberant southern motifs.

From his very first painting, *Still Life with Cabbage and Clogs* (Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam)—created at the end of 1881 in The Hague—to the vibrant floral works painted in Auvers-sur-Oise in 1890, during the last months of the artist's life, for example *Blossoming Chestnut Branches* (Foundation E. H. Bührle, Zürich), Van Gogh returned to still lifes time and again. He did so not just because he thought that floral paintings were easier to sell and would not require him to spend money on models, but above all to explore new pictorial means and possibilities in this genre. He drew on the work of Dutch masters of the seventeenth century—initially Rembrandt, later Jan Davidsz de Heem—but also tried to capture the play of light and shade on the canvas and conducted experiments with color. His choice of ordinary household objects around 1884 marks a break with the tradition of Dutch still life painting.

Van Gogh: Still Lifes examines the artistic questions and decisive stages in Vincent van Gogh's work and life. His still lifes reveal his response to impressionism, which he discovered in Paris between 1886 and 1888, but also show the influence of Japanese woodcuts. Many of his works are symbolically charged with personal references, from books to the recurring motif of a pair of shoes. His development towards an increasingly free, more vibrant handling of color, a central aspect of his work, can be reconstructed from his still lifes. In his letters, too, Van Gogh repeatedly stressed how crucial still lifes were for his artistic development, which shows the importance of this genre for his intensive self-reflection.

The exhibition at the Museum Barberini was developed in cooperation with the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo and the Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam and is also supported

by international loans from museums including the Art Institute of Chicago and the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

In preparation for the exhibition, the Museum Barberini held an international symposium on December 5, 2018. The proceedings will be published in the catalog accompanying the exhibition. Contributors include renowned Van Gogh scholars such as Sjaar van Heugten, Stefan Koldehoff, Eliza Rathbone, and Marije Vellekoop, as well as Oliver Tostmann, Michael F. Zimmermann, and Michael Philipp, chief curator of the Museum Barberini and curator of the exhibition. The exhibition catalog, to be published in German and English, will become the ninth volume in the Museum Barberini's series of publications.

The exhibition is under the patronage of S.E. Wepke Kingsma, the ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Germany.

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