

Vincent's Women: The Untold Story of the Loves of Vincent van Gogh

Donna Russo

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Donna Russo explores the life of Vincent van Gogh through fresh, feminine eyes in her novel *Vincent's Women*.

An outcast since birth, Vincent grows from a lonely, sullen, and inquisitive child into an intense, restless adult whose poor interpersonal skills cost him close relationships. Only his art and his mental illness accompany him through the entirety of his brief life—the former serving as solace from, and an expression of, the latter.

The first woman in Vincent van Gogh's life was Anna, his cold and unhappy mother. The last was Marguerite, the doctor's daughter whose innocent affection could not save him from a violent, mysterious end. In between came a long line of women—among them a struggling sex worker, a headstrong nun, and his loving but harried sister-in-law. Each played a distinct role in shaping Vincent as an artist and a man, seeing and interacting with him differently. Some wished to nurture his kind spirit or spark of genius; others ran from his possessiveness and instability; and some did both. Clipped prose relays the swirl of worry, beauty, joy, and regret that the women brought to Vincent, and he to them.

But in the artist's heartbreaking final moments, it is his loyal brother Theo who provides comfort and words of affection. The women in his life are left to make sense of the tragedy on their own or to brush his memory aside like so much dust. And of all Vincent's women, it is his sister-in-law—driven by guilt as much as affection—who plays the largest role in ensuring his legacy is preserved and appreciated.

Vincent's Women moves beyond the myths to explore how love and the unsuccessful search for it dominated the life of one of the world's most beloved artists.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2024)

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