

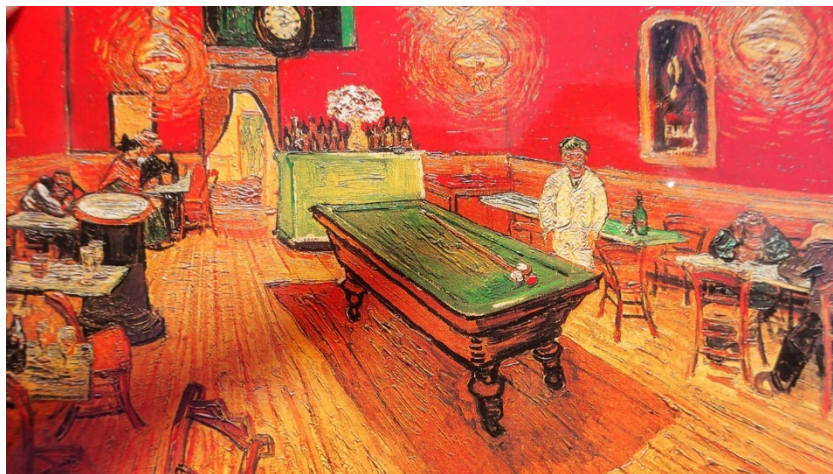
Van Gogh in Arles
and St. Remy
September 2015



Now which famous painting of Vince's are we sitting in? Hint: I'm sipping absinthe, his fave.



Now that was easy to figure out, nec pas? The Night Café on the Plaza du Forum.



This was apparently inside at the time.

INSIDE SHOT

But now it looks like this, fashionably old fashioned, showing its age as it should. Talking about age, The Dragon Lady took me to the night café for my birthday.



His bud Paul Gauguin did one too in his style.



I fell in love immediately with Arles. It's the ambience.



The whole old town is given over to narrow, winding, walking streets and cafes. Don't the French ever work?





I'm not surprised they spend so much time sitting around sipping and nibbling. They're so damn good at it. Cuisine zat eez.



And old it is, dating back to Roman times. Vincent lived at the top of the picture, just where the trees start, not far from the Rhone, where we also parked the Frogmobile.



Les frogs have a love affair with this old Renault like we have with Krautcans, painting them up.



Miss Mars, 97AD.



Of course Vince is everywhere. Between February 1888 and May '89 he painted over 300 canvases in Arles, many amongst my favorites. Everybody loves Van Gogh. Well, everybody but my buddy Al McKenzie.



You get a brochure from Turismo which marks the spots on the map where he stood while slapping oil onto canvas. Sometimes they're accurate.



Sometimes zey pull zee wool over zee eyes. At a glance it wasn't the same drawbridge, confirmed when I overheard a travel guide confide that it wasn't. It was the last one of that style in Arles though, so it's become Pont du Van Gogh.



The central jardin in Arles. Still very beautiful and peaceful. I fell asleep on a park bench for three quarters of an hour. That's the kind of place Arles is. Laid baaaaack.



This was just a couple minutes from his place.



Overlooking the Rhone. Equa-distance to the Frogmobile. The Frogs are well set up for camper vans, with free parking in every city, town and village, and along highways. The Wops the Croatians are the opposite. Camping only at pay sites.



The one disappointment was his yellow house, where he painted his tiny room.



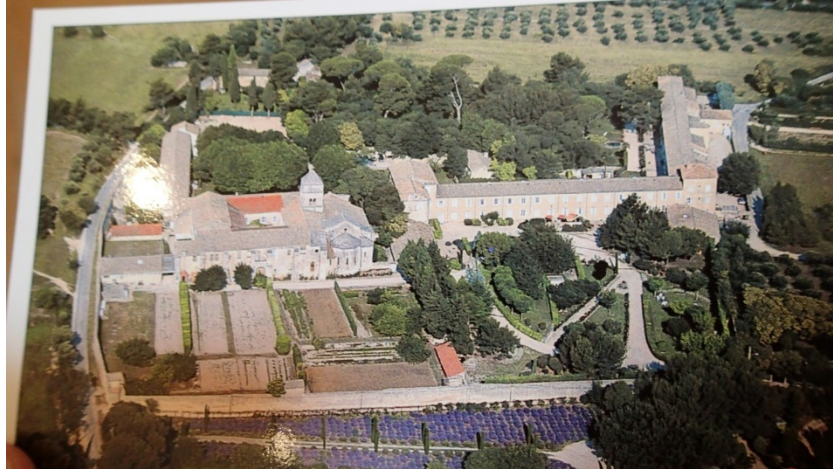
It's gone, though leaving the large building behind and the others. An air force bomb in 1944 took it out. There's still bomb damage to some of the stone steps leading up the quai.



It was also where, after an argument with Gauguin, he cut off a lobe of his ear. That's a perfectly reasonable reaction I'd say, wouldn't you?



Cutting off his ear led directly to him being chucked into the nuthouse in St. Remy for a year. It's only 15 miles away. You always know when you're on a Roman road; it's the only time they're going straight.



The monastery of St. Paul de Mausole has been in operation for 1,000 years. It became an insane asylum 250 years ago. It still is.



I guess because he wasn't completely barking mad all the time he didn't have to room up with the other coo-coos.



Here one can see Vince's tiny room, where he stayed for a year, May 1889 to May 1890. Next stop was Auvers and you know how that went. Actually, here he tried to off himself a few times, drinking turpentine and other oil paint mixes. Extreme manic depressive seems to have been the disorder, but I'd toss borderline personality disorder in too. Plus acute loneliness, insecurity, inadequacy and whatever else you can sweep up. I thought Kirk Douglas did a brilliant job in his portrayal in Lust for Life back in the early 50s. He should have gotten the Oscar for that job. The movie was like a tour through his painting too. Brilliant job.



Through the window and its bars, I can see a square wheat field. A perspective "à la Van Goyen", above which I see the sun rising in its glory every morning. Furthermore – as there are more than thirty empty rooms – I have one more room to work...."



Today's view is a garden.



The stone wall is still there, and the mountains rising on the right, though they're now mostly hidden by trees.

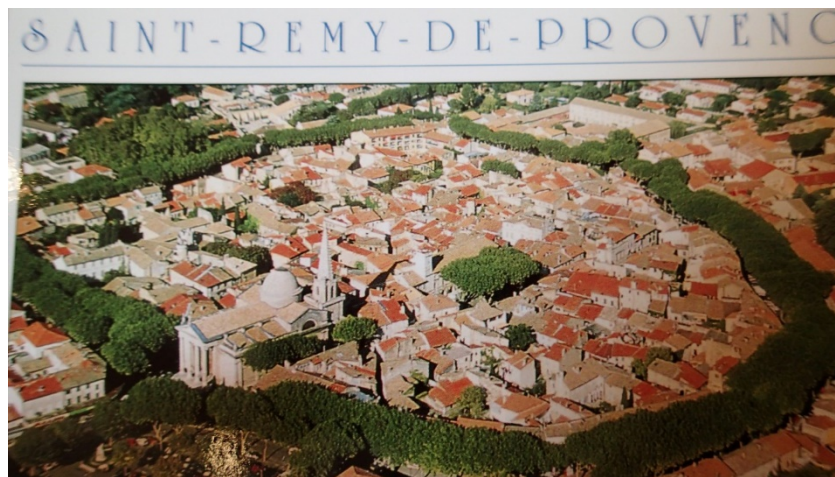


His room was the narrow one below the tower with the two windows.





I can see why he liked it, and he had to have for he resided here longer than anywhere else that I'm aware of. It's very peaceful and tranquil. The cooing of doves was the only sound hear.



St. Remy is much smaller than Arles, though it's one of France's oldest towns too.



It was also earlier a Roman town too. The ruins are just across the road and a small field from the luney bin.



Just 25 miles on is the famous and beautiful Pont du Gard. It's gorgeous country.



Even it had a prehistoric shelter and dig a short distance away.



In some ways the Romans were more appetizing in their bathroom fixtures than today, though privacy wasn't a concern.



Actually it isn't at the offerings at the turismo facilities either. But I'm digressing.



You get the usual map.



But the town has grown and the original views sometimes ain't.



The luney bin is still on the edge of town, joined by a straight Roman road now called Ave Vincent Van Gogh.



You take paradise and put up a parking lot.



When you look closer at Starry Night, you see how small the town was then. And I don't believe he painted it next to what is now the tourism office. It's too close to downtown. The perspective looks more like he painted it from an upper story of the nuthouse at a proper distance.



Ave Vincent Van Gogh road rises steadily from town to the fruitcakery, the Roman ruins - and the limestone crags beyond.



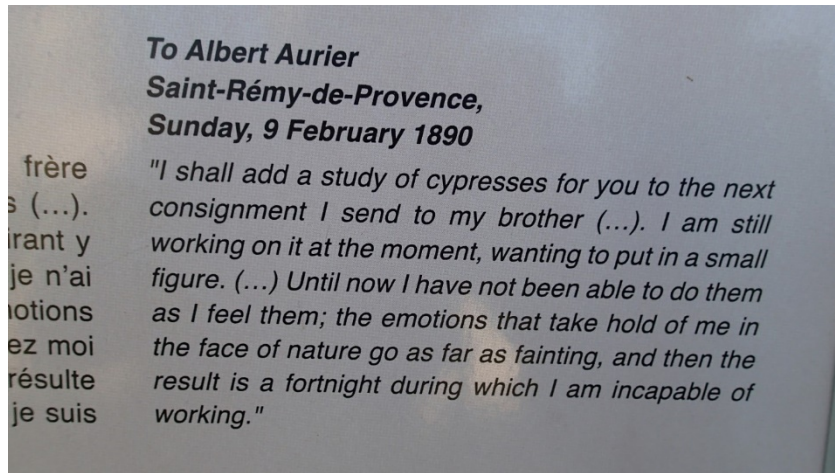
The crags dominate the scenery.



Which Vinnie painted faithfully.



Olive orchards still semi-surround the whackatorium.



His massive correspondence with Theo reveals a highly articulate, intelligent man. And also, obviously, one tortured, the John Lennon of his day. So erratic and bizarre was he that 80 of his neighbours in Arles took up a petition to stop him from returning. That must have done his ego good.



Well, what the hell. Dali paints himself onto the Mona Lisa. Joni fancies herself a tortured Van Gogh. And Vinnie? Nothing less than God's only begotten son. I'm sure he identified with the tortured part.



I wonder what he would have thought if he knew that a painting he knocked off in a day outside the luneybin fetched \$53.9 million in 1987 at Sothebys, setting a new record. One of his sunflower paintings the same year flipped for the equivalent today of \$82 mil. The value of all his painting today are in the billions. But he only sold one in his lifetime. No wonder he was discouraged. That said, he didn't have a key ingredient for success: perseverance.



But that's dwarfed by his old buddy Gauguin. Will you marry me? was picked up by a Qatari carpet jockey for \$300 million this year, setting an all time record for any painting.



