

Chapter One

A First Peek and a Look Ahead for Murder Motives ~133 Years After the Day Van Gogh Was Shot. (“Follow the Money ...Stupid!”)

FOUR VAN GOGH'S HAMMER DOWN FOR \$161 MILLION IN ONE EVENING (November 21, 2021) IN NEW YORK - DOUBLE THEIR CHRISTIE'S ESTIMATES!

The actual energy and excitement during the bidding was palpable, as these four van Gogh works from several different periods gave the audience a then up-to-date sense of the real demand and value for Vincent's art and a contemporary taste of this extremely rare and unique hard asset art market.

So now what if 26 van Gogh paintings and other van Gogh artworks were ALL stolen in just one hot and muggy afternoon in July 1890? YES? --PRICELESS!

That would be an astronomical and yet unbelievable art heist of a single artist in today's art and financial world over 130 years later!

The setting for this startling theft of twenty-six van Gogh's, all stolen in just several hours after his burial, was July 30, 1890 in the bucolic farming village of Auvers-sur-Oise, surrounded by wheatfields, about 20 KM outside Paris. Vincent van Gogh was then an unknown artist just laid to rest in the village cemetery by a small group of his friends, colleagues and his strange doctor, a Parisian bon-vivant who told everyone the gunshot wound to his belly, of all places, was self-inflicted and Vincent “committed suicide”.

The day itself was not otherwise remarkable, just another extremely hot and muggy afternoon, as it had been the past week hovering in the high 90's under the bright yellow sun, sunbaked ground and azure blue skies surrounded by the golden wheatfields that Vincent so loved. This should have been a day that Vincent would have normally enjoyed, had he not been mortally wounded, a few days earlier, on July 27th in an attempted honor killing. It took him 30 hours to die a most unpleasant and painful death in his garret room at the Ravoux Inn. After Vincent succumbed to his wound, dying in the arms of his beloved younger brother,

Theo, an art dealer in Montmartre, who interestingly could not sell his soon to be quite famous brother's paintings, now fetching multi-millions, whenever a major piece becomes available at auction.

This van Gogh art heist, now the largest number and greatest value art theft of any single artist ever, is based on shrouded and sketchy historic events. This was *de facto*, the largest art heist in the nineteenth century and in all of modern art history, excluding the horrific and unconscionable Nazi's rape of the best European art in the twentieth century. At anticipated current market conditions in the modern era with new and innovative world-wide van Gogh interactive exhibitions, uncovering a probable major van Gogh masterpiece, and the unflagging interest in owning a van Gogh, the theft of 26 van Gogh painting definitely must be considered the largest and most valuable art heist in modern times by a single artist.

It far exceeded the more recent unsolved theft on March 18, 1990, of 13 pieces of art from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Boston Museum. Among those stolen most importantly were a Vermeer, a Rembrandt, a Degas, and a Manet. The Boston art is still unrecovered. The FBI originally estimated the value of that theft at 500 million USD. That vast sum was in 1990 dollars. Today's value would be several billion when inflation and other factors are taken into consideration. There is no question as to the significance of this emotional loss to the world art community for the art itself as well as the financial loss in the billions. However, the Boston art theft pales in comparison to the 26 van Gogh's stolen in several hours from his final viewing room exactly one hundred years earlier. However art thefts, forgeries, and fakes have proliferated since ancient times. A most recent look at this prolific and troublesome trust problem of dealer-expert deceit is briefly noted in the context of the van Gogh theft.

Current chatter amongst the art glitterati, suggest that the next notable and available single van Gogh masterpiece might hammer down for an anticipated 340 million in USD. That is just one Vincent painting! Vincent, at his deathbed, had accumulated a magnificent collection of his own art, from what he already possessed at the Ravoux Inn from his ongoing and final artistic works from the last 70 days of his life in Auvers-sur-Oise. This also included paintings he had forwarded to himself from his year-long self-imposed stay at the Asylum in St. Remy after his tumultuous-crazy life with Gauguin and his ear-less departure from Arles.

This most unique stolen Vincent van Gogh art collection was seamlessly combined into an impressive personal art collection by the astute and savvy Parisian art collector Dr. Paul Gachet in the late 19th century. The stolen Vincent art was subtly included in an exhibit of the entire art collection of Dr. Paul Gachet at the Metropolitan Museum in NYC for the first time outside of France in May 1999. The Exhibition catalogue "*CEZANNE TO VAN GOGH-THE COLLECTION OF DOCTOR GACHET*", was brilliantly written and illustrated by Anne Distel and Susan Alyson Stein. In our modern era, more than 100 years after Vincent's suspicious death, the museum brought together the entire collection of Doctor Gachet for all to see. This presumably included the remaining stolen van Gogh's. They only wrote that there were some copies or homage pieces done by the doctor.

The full story to be told now was not revealed then at the exhibition. This story was pulled together because of a deep investigative dive after reviving a 130-year-old cold case homicide. Suicide was not readily accepted by Rigauemon, the investigating gendarme in 1890. Homicide was suspected by him, as suggested contemporaneously but not ruled out as the doctor (Gachet), Vincent's doctor, a person of interest, told him it was a "suicide". Claiming this mysterious death was "just a suicide", was a brilliant coverup deflection for a murder. There was no one to dispute "his doctor". Reviving this old cold case homicide was necessary to successfully prove forensically that Vincent did not commit suicide but was murdered as Rigauemon suspected but could not follow up on without Vincent's critical accusatory testimony.

The focus of this story of love and murder, and the main character, is not so much about Vincent van Gogh as you might have expected, but rather about following his stolen art. To accomplish this diligently, one must follow the long and very sad lonely life of his naïve 21-year-old lover over her remaining years. The remainder of Marguerite Clementine Gachets empty spinster life (not even a widow--officially) remained laser focused on her goals. Her purposeful remaining life was inexorably intertwined with all aspects of Vincent's life, his art and his death-a murder that she witnessed and her only purpose in life was to make her Vincent's life and art better remembered, understood, and accepted for everyone. To finally obtain her well-deserved redemption, she had to protect and promote Vincent's art and his legacy for everyone through many trials and tribulations. She unquestionably was the true

love of his life, and how that love affair and his painting the three portraits of her, not a “peasant girl” as the false narrative would have you believe, led to his honor killing.

These three portraits finished in one week in June, a month before his murder was the trigger when the real identity of who sat for them was uncovered. This exposure of Marguerite as the sitting subject of these three portraits was the catalyst to all those heard arguments by the villagers, between Dr. Gachet and Vincent in the weeks prior to his wounding that led to his murder and consequently the notorious Gachet Art Forgery Ring. How his killing set up the perfect storm for creating the crucial basis for this, the biggest art heist of a single artist... ever is fully explored.

This tale will explicitly reveal the purposely buried and covered up details of the reasons and basis for his murder and this, the greatest modern art heist ever. What actually happened to all these 26 van Gogh's over the next century and how they were used, abused, copied, forged, and misused, only adds to Vincent's cult mystique. This is the backstory to this tale of love and murder involving Marguerite Clementine Gachet and her then unrecognized and unknown, artist-lover, Vincent van Gogh. This critical story was focused and presented as seen through the eyes of Marguerite's documented illegitimate half sister, Louise-Josephine (Gachet) Chevalier. She was the narrator and “a true fly on the wall” for this entire sad tale of jealousy, ego, and greed- resulting in the murder of Vincent van Gogh, the greatest art heist ever, and the course of the Gachet art forgery ring from beginning to end. She really saw it all and told it all to the very intrigued and friendly Inspector Jean-Bernard Dreyfus.

Some of the characters and situations have been altered for dramatic effect or due to lapses in historic gospel, however, the significant consequences of the murder of Vincent van Gogh you are about to see unfold has never fully been explored or told in all the murky and intertwined details. There has been purposeful disinformation surrounding the suspicious death of Vincent. His murder when he was an unknown artist is an amazingly planned coverup to snare all his available art for nefarious reasons soon to be clarified. Vincent was murdered; he did not commit suicide by self-inflicting a single gunshot to his belly, of all places, as so many have believed for over a century. This murder conclusion was confirmed by modern forensics studies. And yet his untimely death opened the way for the most efficient

international Gachet art forgery ring of the late 19th and early 20th century to emerge and fraudulently create provenance havoc.

This tale pursues then the background, critical basis, and all aspects for this, the biggest art heist of a single artist... ever. After Vincent's death, the story of what happens to all this stolen art starts to unravel. It is exciting to connect the dots and follow this thread once the unraveling starts. Following it then creates the critical questioning, unmasking, and damning exposure that leads to the eventual demise of the great Gachet art forgery ring some sixty years later. Somehow this ends with an exoneration for all parties and surprisingly, a Medal of Honor for the head criminal.

Adding dramatically to Vincent's art awareness among the masses and impact in the art world media was the biggest art scandal of the thirty forged van Gogh works on trial in 1930's Berlin. This was big, international news then. These forgeries were on trial just as much as the art dealer Otto Wacker was since he sold them all as original Vincent van Gogh's to greedy collectors and curators knowing they were fakes! These forged, misrepresented, and incorrectly signed off as authentic art done by the hand of Vincent van Gogh brought global attention and awareness to the world of criminal art fraud, questionable provenance, and unreliable paid for signed papers of authentication by the "experts". This explosive worldwide notoriety, however continued to add immeasurably to Vincent's art value and his now legendary stories and cult status.

The thirties, despite the worldwide depression, continued to focus more and more on Vincent and his art. Then Irving Stone's bestselling novel, *LUST FOR LIFE* hit the bookshelves and Vincent's worldwide image and demand, shot up like a rocket. About this time, the Museum of Modern art (MOMA) in NYC held a one man show for Vincent. His fame trajectory could not have been greater for a dead artist. Sadly, for Marguerite, just another crushing emotional challenge for her was when her evil brother forced her to sell at a 1934 auction in Germany, her only tangible and most meaningful real thing she still had from her Vincent. The portrait of her at the piano that hung above her head in her bedroom from when it was painted by Vincent and given to her when the paint had just dried was unceremoniously taken from her. There it had hung until she was forced by her evil brother Paul to relinquish it to auction. This seemed inscrutable and bizarre. Why would they sell

Mademoiselle Marguerite Gachet at the Piano when they had a house full of magnificent impressionist and post-impressionist art to alternatively sell if they needed cash during the depression.

Throw in the SS Nazi's attempted interrogations of Marguerite in Vichy controlled France to find, pillage, and destroy the "decadent" Gachet art collection including van Gogh's, on behalf of Hitler and Goering. Hitler had a deep love-hate feeling for Vincent and his art. This was just another never ending challenge for poor Marguerite to survive and ultimately preserve her Vincent's art and his legacy.

Finally, follow all the stolen Vincent van Gogh art and the Doctor Gachet art collection to its final repository in the Louvre permanent collection after donation to France after WWII. This eventual *quid pro quo* donation of the Gachet family art collection to the Louvre, for a now very questionable exoneration deal of the entire Gachet art forgery ring criminals was completed in 1949. This was a spectacular ending to the travails of Vincent's stolen art from his final viewing surrounding him in mourning to a special place in the Louvre permanent collection and the Musee d'Orsay. That must be one of the most notable and unusual major donations by a single family. At anticipated current market conditions with new and innovative world-wide van Gogh digital large screen exhibitions, recently uncovering a probable major van Gogh masterpiece, and the unflagging interest in owning a van Gogh, the theft of these 26 van Gogh painting must be considered the largest and most valuable art heist in modern times by a single artist. This tale pursues then the background and critical basis for this, the biggest art heist of a single artist... ever, as Vincent's stolen art was seamlessly integrated into the Gachet art collection and then into the permanent collection of the Louvre. Marguerite Clementine Gachet deserves the French Legion of Merit, not her evil murdering brother, Paul Jr. for carrying Vincent's art safely to its final repository and preserving his legacy and his legend. Marguerite Clementine Gachet passed away in 1949 when she knew that her Vincent's art and his legacy was safe, secure and greatly appreciated by the French government, the Louvre and all the worldwide art lovers of her beloved Vincent.