

Vincent van Gogh: lifetime failure or immortal success?

Did Vincent van Gogh kill himself at age 37 because he was a failure repeatedly in his life? His story, like his art, lives on. Find author Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

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What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything? - Vincent van Gogh, Dutch post-Impressionist painter (1853-1890)

You may have heard of the author of this quote. To many--believe this or not--he is a failed painter. Famous, maybe, but a failure.

Why could anyone consider one of the greatest painters in history a failure? Because he never sold a painting during his lifetime. Well, maybe one, if you consider a purchase by his brother Theo, who supported him financially for the last years of his life.

He was a teacher, a parson (at least he aspired to be one), a missionary and an employee of an art dealer. He was very ill for many years, resulting in long pauses between his painting pieces. Illness, among those who are financially successful, is considered a life failure. (How many financially wealthy and powerful people do you know who have disabilities or chronic illnesses?)

His teeth became loose and painful from his poor diet. He spent much of the money Theo sent him on art supplies, not food. At one point he told his brother that he had only eaten about six hot meals in the previous year. And he bought absinthe, his primary alcoholic vice. He may have had syphilis, as he was treated by Dr. Amadeus Cavenaile, whose office was near the docklands and was well known for treating those with the disease.

Does this not sound much like the dropouts, losers and failures of today's society? He only lived 37 years, which we might expect today of drug addicts and the homeless.

However, Vincent was different from most people. Despite his failures, disappointments and bad turns in life, and his poor health when he was supposed to be at his most productive time of life, he had confidence in himself.

Vincent van Gogh dared to take chances with his beloved art. He painted differently from the majority of painters who made their living by selling their art. Who are they and where are their paintings now? we might well ask.

Exactly. Van Gogh is remembered, respected, admired, praised and revered for using the talents he had to produce something worthwhile. Most of the others are forgotten.

Van Gogh has already been dead many times more years than he lived. Yet he is still considered among those at the top of the field.

He dared to be different. He dared to subject himself to ridicule--artists have been known to be cruel when critiquing each other's work.

If you want to be remembered long after you have passed from this mortal coil, you must do something worth remembering. That doesn't have to be artistic, athletic or economic. The founding librarian at my local library will be remembered for many years to come so long as her photo continues to be mounted on the wall in the main lobby.

What van Gogh produced benefited others long after his death. You can do something with the rest of your life so that you will be remembered as well. Do something to help others. I mean, to really help others, not to contribute cash so that others can help them.

That's why we are here on this planet. That's why we remember the helpful ones, those who benefit others, long after they are gone. True, we also remember the brutal killers, but they act as foils so that we know what is wrong and what people can do to go wrong. In their peculiar way, even the great perpetrators of genocide through history

show us that we should not act like them, must prevent others like them from gaining power.

Help someone. Help someone up, not out. Those we consider failures today don't want to be failures. Some desperately want to improve their lot in life, but don't know how. They don't have one person who really cares for their welfare and their future. Many have given up on their own future, which leads others to believe they like living their present lifestyle. No, they just quit fighting.

Theo van Gogh only gave his brother money, which allowed Vincent to paint. But if Vincent had been given care and help by someone with his life, what might he have accomplished during his lifetime?

We don't have answers to these questions. All we can do is to look ahead to what we can accomplish with the rest of our own lives. We can help others.

Bill Allin is the author of ***Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems***, a common sense guidebook, in common language, for parents, teachers and others who want to help children grow to be all they can be. It's for people who care and want to make a difference in the world. Learn more at <http://billallin.com>

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