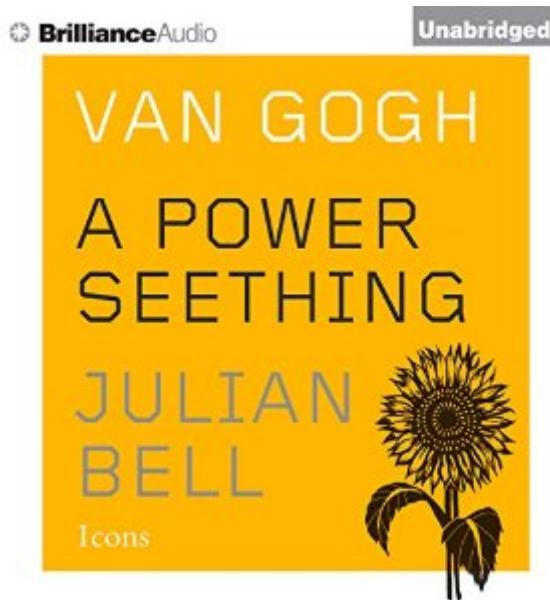


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Van Gogh: A Power Seething: Icons



Synopsis

A passionate account of the tortured life and tragic death of the greatest artist of the nineteenth century, by renowned critic and painter Julian Bell. Van Gogh is a vivid portrait of the great Impressionist painter that traces his life from the Netherlands, where he was born into a family of art dealers, through his years in England, the Hague, and Paris, to his final home in Arles, where he discovered the luminous style of his late paintings before his suicide at the age of thirty-seven. Van Gogh struggled to find his way as an artist: Well into his mid-twenties he had achieved virtually nothing except a few charcoal drawings of coal miners. Afflicted by mental illness and a mercurial temper, he was institutionalized several times toward the end of his life. Julian Bell conveys this tragic story with great compassion, depicting van Gogh in all his anguished vigor, a genius for whom the greatest challenge was to stay alive until he had completed his most fully realized and magnificent works.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I picked up Julian Bell's "Van Gogh: A Power Seething" hoping to gain some insight on the man that is so well known for works like "The Starry Night" and "Wheatfield With Crows." I've always been interested in Van Gogh's work and his frantic life, and Bell does a very decent job of giving a summary of both in this book. It's a biography primarily culled from the letters that Vincent Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo, as well as a few to his sister, Wil, and his mother, Ana. This provides the reader with a very personal look at Vincent's life. He had a way with words that was nearly equal to

his work with paint. Reading these excerpts from his letters was the most enjoyable aspect of this book. Other letters (primarily from Theo to Vincent) and other sources were also used. Bell covers the entirety of Van Gogh's brief and often tumultuous life, using the letters to describe his bouts of anger, frustration, and melancholy as a result of a mental illness that seemed to get worse as he aged. Bell shows us how Vincent and Theo truly were loving brothers despite numerous confrontations with each other. We also get to see how Vincent could become extremely gentle and caring in the way that he helped his mother when she became bedridden for awhile due to injury and in the way he loved the child of Gordina de Groot despite not being the boy's father. In short, Bell lets us see the life of one of the greatest artists ever (at least in my opinion) and shows us just how truly tragic it was. So why three stars? For starters (and this is just my opinion), Bell's use of the letters and then interweaving his own writing between often made it difficult to see where Van Gogh's writing ended and Bell's began.

...and we know who we are, or should. We sat around with our girlfriends in college, singing along with a cassette recording of "Starry Starry Night" with Don McClean, tearier than sober freshmen have any right to be on such an occasion. Decades later, we watched breathlessly as a fiery "ultimate ginger" of Dutch descent parried with the equally acid-tongued Amy Pond in a dark-tinged but lyrical Doctor Who episode. Let's face it, we don't want to actually know who this Vincent Van Gogh guy **was**. What he was, Julian Bell tells us, was a bright intellect, a horrible student, the mentally afflicted eldest boy in a family beset with mental illness. It might have been due to these issues that he was so alienated from his fellow human beings, but by all reports he was harsh, disagreeable, self-absorbed, self-pitying, non-empathetic and even vindictive -- never simply mopey, awkward, or misunderstood. The kind of guy who stalks the uninterested daughter of family friends, insisting that she marry him, and stirs up late night yelling matching with her folks and his in the process. The kind of guy who cuts off and proffers a part of his ear to a prostitute, spurred by some fevered notion of making a metaphorical show of political solidarity. Still singing along? Oh, and also in possession of unquenchable curiosity and a keen sense of awe and an even keener ability to translate raw raging emotion into color and brushstrokes. That's why he's immortal, although the name turned into a legend that the artist himself would not recognize. The real story is worlds away from any kind of pretty one. Not that I'm taken completely by surprise.

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