

<p>Vincent van Gogh, <i>Bedroom at Arles,</i> 1888, oil on canvas 72 x 90 cm (28 x 35")</p> <p>There are three versions. This first is owned by the Van Gogh estate and is on show in the Vincent van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. (The second version is in The Art Institute of Chicago and a third is now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Initial analysis</p> <p>The details in this analysis are derived from some of the letters Van Gogh wrote to his brother and the over-cautious description of the picture given by the curators at the Vincent van Gogh Museum. My suggestion is that Van Gogh was overwhelmed by the excitement engendered in his preparations for the painting facture. A comparison of his early sketches and the eventual layout, the skew of the paintings on the right wall and the differences between sketches of the proportional sizes of the two chairs, all contribute to making this clear. The achievement in the painting need not be in doubt, its shifts away from verisimilitude do not change that judgement. Van Gogh correctly sees this achievement when he wrote saying, 'When I saw my canvases again after my illness, what seemed to me the best was the bedroom.'</p>	<p>Van Gogh included a sketch of the composition in a letter to Theo van Gogh as well as an enclosure in a letter to Paul Gauguin, written on the following day. In the letter to Theo, Vincent explained that the painting had come out of a sickness that left him bedridden for days. This version has on the wall to the right miniatures of van Gogh's portraits of his friends Eugène Boch and Paul-Eugène Milliet. The portrait of Boch is called <i>The Poet</i> and the portrait of Milliet is called <i>The Lover</i>.</p>
<p>Van Gogh claimed that the bright colours in this painting were meant to express absolute 'repose' or 'sleep'. Research shows that the strongly contrasting colours seen in the work today are the result of discolouration over the years. The walls and doors, for instance, were originally purple rather than blue. The corner of the rear wall in the actual room (evident in the plans of the room) is skewed. The skew is then complexed by Van Gogh's decision to facture the work dramatically. To do this he does not accurately apply the rules of perspective and proportion. Vincent told his brother Theo in a letter that he had deliberately 'flattened' the interior and left out the shadows so that his picture would resemble a Japanese print, but he does not mention the incongruent vertical edges of the paintings on the right wall in relation to the corner of the room, or the extreme foreshortening of the bed and disproportions evident in the sizes of the two chairs. The sketches indicate changes in his decisions regarding proportions. The size of the jug on the left in the painting varies from that in the sketches. The position of the straw hat varies.</p>	<div data-bbox="507 719 1066 1160" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Referring to the first version of the painting, Van Gogh wrote to Theo van Gogh on 16th October 1888, 'This time it simply reproduces my bedroom; but colour must be abundant in this part, its simplification adding a rank of grandee to the style applied to the objects, getting to suggest a certain rest or dream. Well, I have thought that on watching the composition we stop thinking and imagining. I have painted the walls pale violet. The ground with checked material. The wooden bed and the chairs, yellow like fresh butter; the sheet and the pillows, lemon light green. The bedspread, scarlet coloured. The window, green. The washbasin, orangey; the tank, blue. The doors, lilac. And, that is all. There is not anything else in this room with closed shutters. The square pieces of furniture must express unswerving rest; also the portraits on the wall, the mirror, the bottle, and some costumes. The white colour has not been applied to the picture, so its frame will be white, aimed to get me even with the compulsory rest recommended for me. I have depicted no type of shade or shadow; I have only applied simple plain colours, like those in crêpes.'</p> <p>The deliberate drama of the picture, has been exaggerated by Van Gogh's perspectival shifts and these shifts have been enhanced by the unusually shaped room and emphasised by the skew of the paintings on the right hand wall. These features contribute to giving excitement to the experience of viewing, rather than the repose and rest he proposes.</p>	<p>The room depicted was Van Gogh's bedroom in the Yellow House in Arles. The door to the right opened to the staircase to the upper floor; the door to the left was that of the guest room he had prepared for Gauguin; the shuttered window when opened looked out on Place Lamartine and its public gardens. This room was not rectangular but trapezoid with an obtuse angle in the left hand corner of the front wall and an acute angle at the right.</p> <p>In April 1889, van Gogh sent the initial version of the painting to his brother regretting that it had been damaged by the flood of the Rhône while he was interned at the Old Hospital in Arles. Theo proposed to have it relined and sent it back to him in order to copy it. This 'repetition' in original scale (Van Gogh's term was <i>répétition</i>) was factured a year later in September 1889. Both paintings were then sent back to Theo.</p> <p>In summer, 1889, Van Gogh finally decided to redo some of his 'best' compositions in smaller size (the term he used was <i>réductions</i>) for his mother and sister Wil. <i>The Bedroom</i> was one of the subjects he chose. These <i>réductions</i>, finished late in September 1889, are not exact copies.</p>