

Room 1

Introduction

In February 1888, the Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) went to live and work in the South of France. Over the next two years, in both Arles and Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, he created an extraordinary and innovative body of work in which he transformed the people and places he encountered in life. Parks, landscapes and corners of nature became highly expressive, idealised spaces full of literary and poetic references. Similarly, Van Gogh chose individuals from his new surroundings to create portraits of symbolic types, such as *The Poet* or *The Lover*.

The careful planning behind Van Gogh's art extended to creating works in groups or series, and to thinking about how these might be displayed both at his home in Arles and for exhibition in Paris. By gathering a selection of

these paintings – many of which are among his most famous and beloved creations – and showing them alongside his carefully developed works on paper, a less familiar Van Gogh emerges: an intellectual artist of lucid intention, deliberation and great ambition.

This first major exhibition devoted to Van Gogh in the National Gallery's history is chief among the events celebrating the Gallery's bicentenary. It also marks 100 years since the Gallery purchased the *Sunflowers* and *Van Gogh's Chair* for the Collection.

A brief chronology of Van Gogh's life, with a focus on his time in the South of France when he experienced periods of mental illness, can be found at the end of this booklet.