TPO60L1 The historical development and use of oil paint Listen to part of a lecture in an art history class.

As you know, artists today can choose from an enormous selection of media, including watercolors, acrylic paints, not to mention special pains formulated for almost any surface you might wanna paint on. But even so, oil paints are still the medium of choice among most professional artists and hobbyists. So why is that? Well, for one thing, oil paints extremely versatile, suitable for many different painting styles, different subjects, and different sizes of work. Another advantage is that they're easy to use, even for beginners, they can be manipulated, you can apply oil paint to a canvas. And then because they don't dry right away, they can be scraped off and paint it over. So you don't have to waste expensive material every time you make a change. Unlike acrylic paint, which really can't be moved once it's applied, acrylic paints dry very quickly. So in general, when using them, it's more difficult to make changes. And with watercolors, you can't really paint over a mistake, because it really diminishes the freshness of the colors. So oil paint is the medium of choice for many painters. Nowadays, anyway, in terms of art history, oil paints actually pretty young. In Europe, before the invention, rather, the development of oil paint . Painters mostly used tempera, tempera was made with egg yolk, believe it or not? The yolk acted as a binder. a binder enables the color pigment to stick to your canvas, and no tempera wasn't always yellow, if that's what you're thinking. Artists made their own paint by mixing egg yolk with a color pigment like powdered iron or copper, but it dried very fast, which left little room for error or change. You really had to get it right the first time.

Then in the early 15th century, a Flemish painter named Jan van Eyck started experimenting. After the tempera in one of the Nike’s paintings cracked while drawing in the sun. He decided to try to make a paint that would avoid this fade. So he tried an oil mixture, actually other painters before him had tried using oils as a binder. So while the Nike’s credited with inventing oil paint, it's not entirely true. In Greece and Italy, olive oil had been used to prepare pigment mixtures, but the paint took a really long time to dry, just the opposite of tempera. But van Eyck had a secret recipe for his oil paint, he used linseed oil. Not only did this paint dry without cracking, van Eyck also discovered that it could be applied in very thin layers. This technique gave the colors of depth that was previously unknown. And just as important, the linseed oil actually increased the brilliance of the color. So as a result, pigment oil mixtures became very popular among artists. Some tried to improve the paint by developing their own recipes, like uh, by using walnut oil, for instance, or by cooking their oil mixtures. But a great many began using some sort of oil as their binder.

Now with all this experimentation with mixtures, Well, it took a long time for artists to get comfortable with using these new oil paints to get a true feeling for how to apply them to the best effect. The early painters in oil like van Eyck, laid the paint down in thin layers with brush strokes that were so delicate that they're practically invisible. And it really wasn't until the end of the 16th century and in the 17th century that the full potential of oil paint was realized. For example, that's when artists finally began to combine delicately painted areas with thick brush strokes. So you could actually see the marks of the brush, combining the rough and the smooth gives oil paintings great textural depth.

Of course, the public who are used to smooth surfaces actually complained that these paintings looked unfinished, and some of that attitude carried over until later centuries. Like, well, you're probably familiar with the work of the painter Vincent van Gogh. van Gogh’s famous nowadays for his thick, swirling brush strokes. But amazingly enough, his work was not appreciated back in the 19th century, and he sold just one painting during his lifetime. Of course, the French impressionists, who were his contemporaries, attained more popular acclaim, but they used a different technique. They applied oil paint and thick dabs to depict the effects of light on the landscape.