



Comparative Study

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Complex themes and hidden meanings are nothing new to art, and have been around throughout the classic and contemporary artworks. In this study, I will be focused on analyzing the themes and formal aspects conveyed by different paintings from two very different time periods—post-impressionist painter Vincent van Gogh and contemporary Milwaukee artist Adrienne Pierluissi—and fixate on the emotions and meanings that exist behind what originally meets the eye. The pieces *Irises* and *Fourteen Sunflowers in a Vase* by Vincent van Gogh and artwork *The Four Seasons* by Adrienne Pierluissi will be the main focus, specifically analysing, both by using cultural context and formal qualities, the themes and messages conveyed through floral images. I have used both of these artists as inspirations in my own artwork, especially in the way I have been pushed to express who I think I am through unconventional combinations of imagery and themes. These two artists, and myself as well, see flowers with different perspectives, and convey thoughts and feelings differently through them. This will all be discussed throughout this comparative study.

Evaluation of Cultural Significance of Vincent Van Gogh



Van Gogh, Vincent. "Irises." *Vincent Van Gogh Gallery*, 1889, Los Angeles: Getty Center, www.vggallery.com/painting/p_0608.htm.



Van Gogh, Vincent. "Pair of Shoes." *Vincent Van Gogh*, 1886, www.vincentvangogh.org/a-pair-of-shoes.jsp.

Today Vincent van Gogh is considered one of the greatest painters of all time, but his fame was posthumous—selling only one painting successfully during his lifetime. He was a post-impressionist painter who struggled with depression for most of his life.

Van Gogh's art helped his mental health. His depictions of the inner-spirituality of both men and nature, through deeply emotional paintings, convey much more than what originally meets the eye; many of his paintings symbolize his struggle with mental health, and he often depicted himself as run-down or lonely inanimate objects. His inevitable self-destructive nature deeply influence 20th century artists, echoing his impulsive and gestural brush strokes and use of vibrant color to show strong emotions.

“A great fire burns within me, but no one stops to warm themselves at it, and passers-by only see a wisp of smoke” -Vincent van Gogh

Producing more than 2,000 works of art during his art career, that only lasted a decade, nature was the sole spark that influenced most of his emotionally complex artworks.

Evaluation of Cultural Significance of Adrienne Pierluissi

Adrienne Pierluissi resides in Bay View, a small neighborhood along the lake in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Born in 1965, she became a professional artist when she was in her low twenties. Pierluissi started her artistic career painting figurative pieces but made a radical switch in 1999. “I was fed up,” she is quoted for saying when asked about the radical change. “I wanted more with my imagery. I wanted to be able to convey emotions that non-abstract paintings just cannot convey.” And she is definitely capable of capturing such found meaning and emotions.

Working as a modern artist, it is hard to see how she is influencing the artists around her. Her goals through her paintings are to make her audience feel something, and everyone who looks at her paintings feels something different. “I like to think that my paintings can make different people feel differently. No two people should have the same reaction from my paintings, and quite honestly the responses I get from my audience are often surprising to me.” Looking at her pieces, we see the use of **color**, **line**, **balance**, and **contrast** as symbols of different profound ideas, most of which Pierluissi wasn’t aware they could symbolize.

Pierluissi identifies on her own in art; she is greatly influenced by the great painters of the abstract expressionist movement, specifically Pollock, but she doesn’t think that she is like Pollock in any way.

“I used to think I was crazy, and it took me 53 years to realize that I’m not. I am an artist.” -Adrienne Pierluissi



A Painting by Adrienne Pierluissi. Dec. 2018.



Pierluissi, Adrienne. “Adrienne Pierluissi Facebook Page.” *Adrienne Pierluissi Facebook Page*, Facebook, 2019, Sugar Maple Bar, www.facebook.com/adrienne.pierluissi/photos?lst=1569257087:1523314375:1550515273.

Cultural Significance in Van Gogh's and Pierluissi's Art

Adrienne Pierluissi

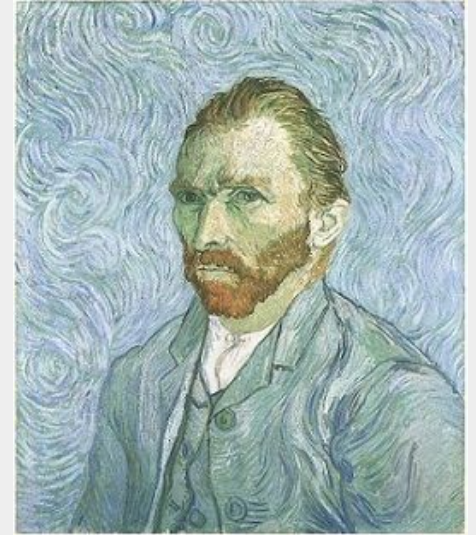
- Modern
- City
- Fifty years old
- Mother and happy
- Wants her work to make people feel *something*

Vincent van Gogh

- 1800s
- Rural but traveled
- Died at 37 yo
- Depressed
- Wanted his work to convey his own feelings



Rasmussen, Nick, and Edible Milwaukee. "Sugar Maple." *Edible Milwaukee*, Milwaukee, WI, Mar. 2016, ediblemilwaukee.ediblecommunities.com/drink/round-cr-aft-beer-bars.



Van Gogh, Vincent. "Vincent Van Gogh: Self Portraits." *Vincent Van Gogh: Self Portraits*, Van Gogh Gallery, www.vangoghgallery.com/misc/selfportrait.html.

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Formal Qualities of Vincent Van Gogh

The most common theme seen in Vincent van Gogh's work is identity. Struggling with mental illnesses his entire life. Van Gogh was able to convey deeply emotions through ordinary objects, most popularly being flowers. He used floral images to express self destruction, loneliness, sadness, and isolation, just to name a few common themes seen in his works. He is most known for using vibrant **colors** to clearly express emotions in a loud way and **texture** to create **form** and appeal to the senses of his viewers.

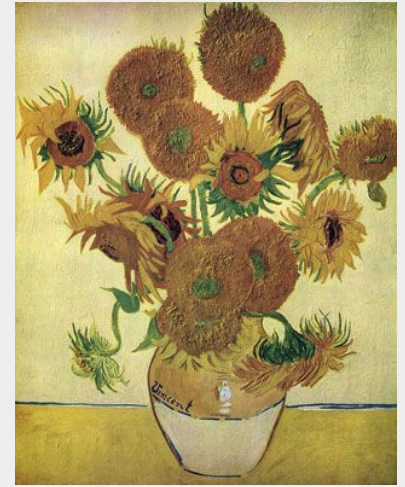
Many of his pieces are representative of his plaguing mental illness that he suffered with most of his life, which can be seen through the strong and vibrant **color schemes** that Van Gogh often chooses to incorporate in his pieces. In his infamous piece *Six Flowers*, he uses a deep royal blue in the background, showing an immense sadness through the vibrant cold color, which helps **emphasize** the yellow sunflowers in the foreground. This is meant to show the hidden depression that Vincent van Gogh often faced, but the foreground of beautiful sunflowers seems to cancel that sadness out, in a sense. He is known for creating these subtle **contrasting** ideas within his pieces.

His use of **color** was primarily focused on the expression of emotion, rather than for a realistic, visual appeal. This is similar to the artists residing in the Impressionist movement.

Especially seen in his sunflower series, where Van Gogh often depicts the stages of life in subtle ways and is known for incorporating his own unstable emotions into the flowers themselves, **texture** helps convey his common themes of self destruction and loneliness/isolation. He is well known for his use of emphatic and confident brushstrokes to create **texture**, in the background but specifically in the flowers. This



Van Gogh, Vincent. "Six Sunflowers." *BBC*, www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140120-van-goghs-flower-power.



Van Gogh, Vincent. "Fourteen Sunflowers in a Vase." *The Art Story*, 1888, The National Gallery, London, www.theartstory.org/artist-van-gogh-vincent-artworks.htm

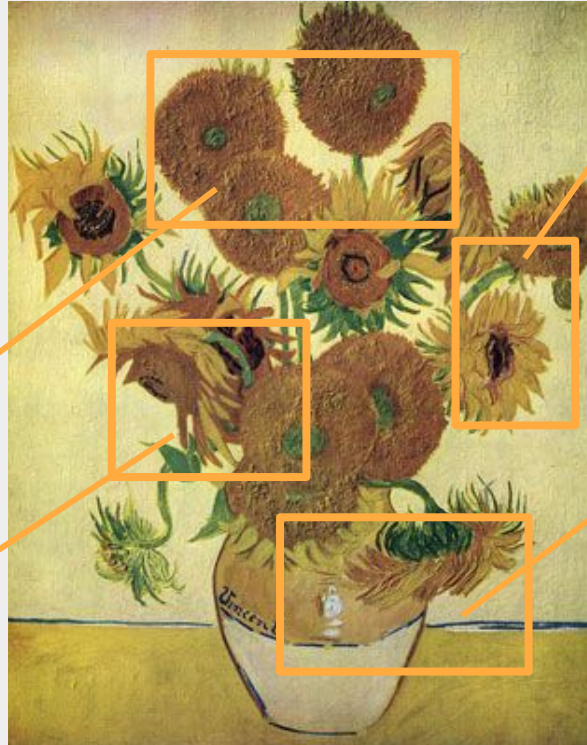
Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Annotation of *Fourteen Sunflowers in a Vase* by Vincent van Gogh

In Vincent van Gogh's infamous paintings of sunflowers are often the first thing art viewers think of when they hear Vincent van Gogh.

The work shows all stages of a life of a sunflower, from the in bloom and colorful flower, to the wilting plants colored in an agonizing ochre. Van Gogh uses purposeful and bold brushstrokes to create **texture** throughout the piece; this helps create **form**, which better appeals to the senses. This pulls the viewer into the painting to feel the flowers and smell the pain of growing old and (figuratively) wilting.

He then uses **color** to convey a large spectrum of yellows in the vase, which cultivates the spectrum of a sunflower's life.



Vincent van Gogh's piece is so aesthetically pleasing because of the **unity** created by painting with **colors** that all have similar base tones. The yellows, browns, and greens used in this piece all have a warm undertone. Together this creates a content and peaceful tone.

This contrasts with Milwaukee artist Adrienne Pierluissi's *Four Seasons* where she uses contrasting colors to create emphasis on poppy flowers.

To Van Gogh, his sunflower paintings symbolizes happiness, originally displayed against the plain white walls of this studio in Arles, France. This can be seen through the vibrant yellows that were used in the flowers as well as the background. These **colors** were attainable because of new pigment innovations created in the late 19th century.

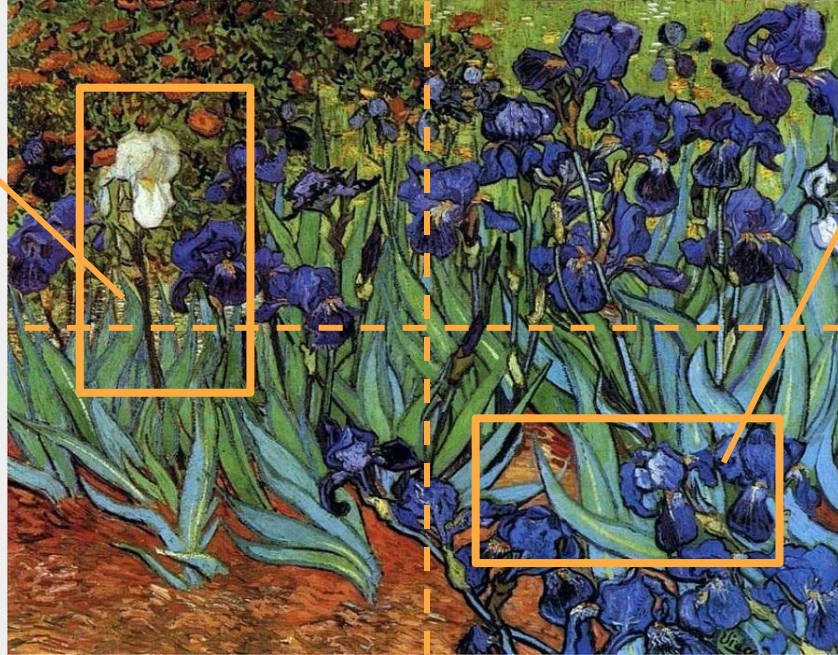
Van Gogh, Vincent. "Fourteen Sunflowers in a Vase." *The Art Story*, 1888, The National Gallery, London, www.theartstory.org/artist-van-gogh-vincent-artworks.htm

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Annotation of *Iris* by Vincent van Gogh

In his piece *Iris*, Van Gogh disrupts the sense of **unity** in his piece by **contrasting** the white iris against the sea of blue. The white iris is a self portrait, representing how lonely he feels. He compares himself to an ostracized iris, casted aside and stands out as something different and possibly even rejected.

The use of **balance** also helps convey the theme of alienation and lonely theme. The white iris is placed on the far right in the background. Although it is mostly surrounded by blue irises, it is obvious that it is casted aside and doesn't belong in the composition.



Van Gogh is well known for his use of **color**, which he uses to create **texture**, **emphasis**, and **unity**—or lack of. In this piece, the vibrant blue helps create a sad tone, and cool colors underly the rest of the painting in the cold greens of the flower stems, especially in the foreground.

Formal Qualities of Adrienne Pierluissi's Artwork

Adrienne Pierluissi is known for her largest piece, called *Four Seasons*, which was created around the same time as Donald Trump's inauguration.

“At first I didn't even know that they were poppies,” Pierluissi says, “...I just felt something and painted it... I just want to take away from the preciousness of art.” -Adrienne Pierluissi

To disrupt the norm, she used brooms and mops to apply paint onto the canvas and put up 52 paintings outside in a circle, where snow, rain, and wind could wear on them. “They were exposed to the elements,” she comments.

Many of her paintings are inspired by traumatic experiences, where she creates art in response to an event which helps focus the viewers' responses. The piece shown to the right shows a metallic painting done after the terrible hurricane hitting Puerto Rico in 2018.

Her pieces that make up *Four Seasons* depict a cycle of a poppy life span. She created these in response to the emotional backlash of Donald Trump's inauguration. In *Summer Poppies Fourteen*, she uses a bright yellow **hue** to brighten the overall **value** of the piece and create a hopeful and happy tone. She is known for her seemingly rushed brushstrokes which create a soft and blurred **texture** which can add to a sense **movement**. The purpose of her art is to evoke emotion and imagination in her viewers. The **contrasting colors** and bold **texture** is meant to remind the reader of past experiences and emotion.



Friedman, Tyler. “Visual Arts Preview: Feb. 15, 2018.” *Shepherd Express*, Shepherd Express, 13 Feb. 2018, shepherdexpress.com/arts-and-entertainment/visual-art/visual-arts-preview-feb-15-2018/.



Pierluissi, Adrienne. “Summer Poppies Fourteen.” *Poppies Four Seasons*, Four Seasons, 2016, poppiesfourseasons.com/paint-14.php.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Annotation of *Four Seasons* by Adrienne Pierluissi

The formal elements of Pierluissi's art is what ties the meaning into the extraordinary piece.

Balance refers to the position of the elements of design within the composition. It offers stability or takes it away from the piece and its meaning. Pierluissi's use of **balance** in seemingly random among the multiple paintings in this series. This is meant to show the natural **imbalance** of life, symbolizing the ebbs and flows of a season. It helps show the cycle of hope in form of the life span of a poppy. It also creates a chaotic tone, along with the help of the piece's **texture** created from the wild brush strokes, especially seen in the grass.



Pierluissi, Adrienne. "Spring Poppies 10." *Poppies Four Seasons*, Four Seasons, 2016, poppiesfourseasons.com/paint-14.php.



Pierluissi, Adrienne. "Spring Poppies 01." *Poppies Four Seasons*, Four Seasons, 2016, poppiesfourseasons.com/paint-14.php.

Four Seasons consisted of four distinct series in form of seasons. Stereotypically, spring represents a new beginning. The **warm colors** in the background and underly in the foreground is a representation of hope and contentment. This is ironic considering the time period this piece was created during (Trump's inauguration where Pierluissi's predominantly minority community was lacking hope).

The vibrance in the **color** present in the poppies create **emphasis** to the rebirth of these vividly depicted flowers. This helps build the symbolism of beginning and hope.

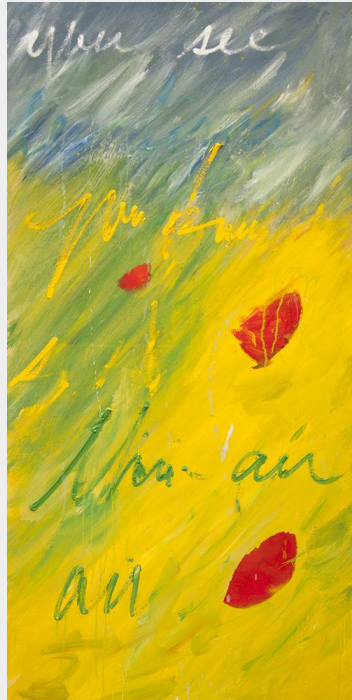
Color is a very important formal quality in Adrienne Pierluissi's work *The Four Seasons*. This is similar to Vincent van Gogh's use of color, recalling the piece *Fourteen Sunflowers in a Vase* where the background of the piece helps create the overall tone of the piece using **warm colors**.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

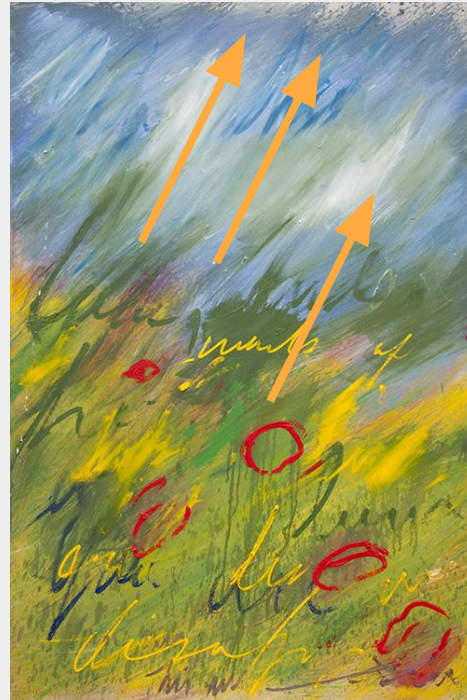
Annotation of *Four Seasons* by Adrienne Pierluissi

Adrienne Pierluissi's piece *Four Seasons* explores the complexities of time and questions what we know of the cycle of life. To the right are two paintings from Pierluissi's summer section from the 52 panels that were installed. Summer takes up 12.

Pierluissi uses **color** in a different way in these pieces than in her spring pieces shown before. As the **warm colors** represented content and hope in her spring collection, the **contrasting yellow with grey** in summer represents discontent and unsettle. This is to evoke emotion in her pece, and she is representing the anxiety of her community following the 2016 election.



Pierluissi, Adrienne. "Summer Poppies 19." *Poppies Four Seasons, Four Seasons*, 2016, poppiesfourseasons.com/paint-14.php.



Pierluissi, Adrienne. "Summer Poppies 23." *Poppies Four Seasons, Four Seasons*, 2016, poppiesfourseasons.com/paint-14.php.

“I didn’t know this piece was political at first, but then I kept painting, and the meaning seemed to appear on my canvas. I knew what I had to do.” -

Adrienne Pierluissi

In these pieces, it is easy to see the **movement** Pierluissi creates in the sweeping brush strokes she uses in her piece. Both the grass and the sky seem to be moving to the right, which helps symbolize the passing of time and strengthens her idea of the circle of death, which is meant to represent the cycle in which we cope with trauma.

Comparison of Technique in Van Gogh's and Pierluissi's Art

How creation of art adds to the end result and symbolism

The application of paint and the final placement of the art pieces contribute to the overall meaning of the final piece. This is seen when comparing how Adrienne Pierluissi and Vincent van Gogh both were able to create theme and symbolism in different ways due to their complex and purposeful brushstrokes.

Renowned artist, Vincent van Gogh, is well known for his stirring nature and the people living in it artist viewpoints. Every single painting of his included nature in some way, often depicting a beautiful landscape or a garden in his pieces.

Always continue walking a lot and loving nature, for that's the real way to learn to understand art better and better - Vincent van Gogh

He paints with agony and emotion, using the principles of art and design purposefully, such as **balance**, **color**, and **texture**. He relies on these principles and elements to relay his depression and loneliness through his saturated artworks.

This strongly differs with Adrienne Pierluissi, who abandons traditional art "rules" and applies her paint unconventionally. Using uncontrolled brush strokes evoked by her feelings and strong emotions of community (and lack of), Adrienne Pierluissi depicts flowers and the natural world as one that is bold on a canvas.

With her abrupt and dramatic sweeps of mops and crusty brooms, Pierluissi disrupts the perfection of van Gogh's pieces and creates a sense of uncontrolled chaos which helps her create a more effective tone.



Van Gogh, Vincent. "Fourteen Sunflowers in a Vase." *The Art Story*, 1888, The National Gallery, London, www.theartstory.org/artist-van-gogh-vincent-artworks.htm



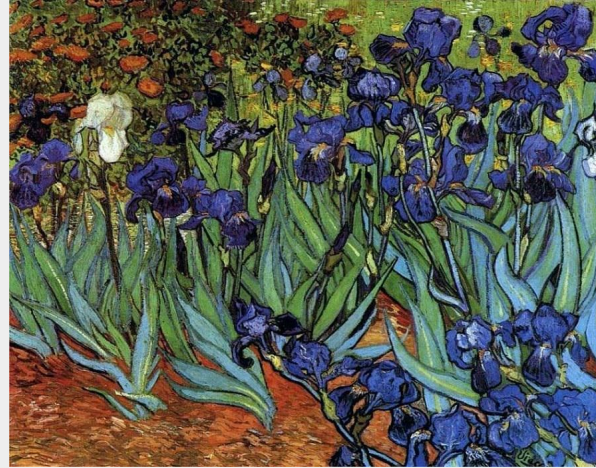
Use of **Color** in Van Gogh's and Pierluissi's Art

The use of **color** in both Vincent van Gogh's *Iris* and in Adrienne Pierluissi's *Four Seasons* is used to better establish the theme of the overall piece through **emphasis**, but in different ways.

In *Iris*, Van Gogh uses **color** to create **emphasis** on the singled out white iris. The way he ostracizes the anomalous iris by disrupting the overall **unity** of the piece. This creates the sense of loneliness and alienation that Vincent van Gogh's mental illnesses often pushed him to feel, the underlying theme being loneliness and is meant to describe how he often feels, like a white iris that doesn't fit in the garden.

In Pierluissi's *Four Seasons*, she uses **contrasting colors** (ie the red poppies against the soft green grass in the background) to **emphasize** this stage of life in the poppies. The use of **contrasting color** helps convey how she feels towards Donald Trump's inauguration, and how what she once perceived as the beginning maybe only be a middle stage of a much longer "life", so to speak, that meets the eye.

Both artists use **color** to convey how they feel by representation of flower. The white iris in Van Gogh's piece **contrasts** with the surrounding blue irises in the rest of the garden, which conveys a lonely tone throughout the piece. Pierluissi red poppies do something similar against the **contrasting** green grass, suggesting a discomfort between the two conflicting colors. Although Adrienne Pierluissi didn't intend for the poppies to be a self portrait, I believe that they are, just like Van Gogh's iris. But instead of an individual self portrait, she paints a community of worried and discomforted minorities in her community, and arguably throughout to the US. Both styles of art **emphasizes** the flowers as important symbols of themselves, by using **contrasting color**.



Van Gogh, Vincent. "Iris." *Vincent Van Gogh Gallery*, 1889, Los Angeles: Getty Center, www.vggallery.com/painting/p_0608.htm.



Pierluissi, Adrienne. "Spring Poppies 01." *Poppies Four Seasons, Four Seasons*, 2016, poppiesfourseasons.com/paint-14.php.

Use of **Texture** in Van Gogh's and Pierluissi's Art

When painting, Adrienne Pierluissi used mops and brooms to apply the paint on the canvas. She did this to take away from the preciousness of art. She wanted her piece to be fierce and uncontrollable. She believed that the art was more than the art itself, but that the process and the place of installment were key pieces in the meaning as well as the actual composition. The **texture** Adrienne Pierluissi uses it to support her overall theme of community discomfort as she attempts to uncover the unrest that had washed over her community following an intense presidential election in 2016.

While Pierluissi uses texture to strengthen her piece's theme, Van Gogh uses **texture** to show the turbulence of his mind. During his most psychotic episodes, in the most instability of his mind, Van Gogh is able to mimic turbulence as we know it naturally. This turbulent **texture** can be specifically seen in *A Starry Night* where Van Gogh captures the complex mathematical turbulence of luminescence fluctuations seen in the natural world.

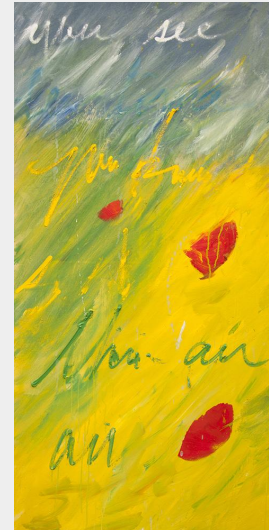
These two artists use **texture** in similar ways, capturing agitation, while Adrienne Pierluissi uses sweeping **texture** to create an agitated tone in her piece by creating randomized marks and disrupting the preciousness of art as the viewer accepted it, Vincent van Gogh captures the turbulence of his mind and taps into the mathematical realm when explaining his own psychosis.



Pierluissi, Adrienne, director. *B-Roll Clips : Winter*. Vimeo, Poppies : Four Seasons, Dec. 2015, vimeo.com/148114050.



Holodny, Elena. "Why Physicists Are Fascinated by Vincent Van Gogh's Episodes of 'Psychotic Agitation!'" *Business Insider*, Business Insider, Jan. 2018, www.businessinsider.com/why-physicists-love-vincent-van-gogh-2015-10.



Pierluissi, Adrienne. "Summer Poppies 19." *Poppies Four Seasons*, Four Seasons, 2016, poppiesfourseasons.com/paint-14.php.

Use of **Balance** in Van Gogh's and Pierluissi's Art

- **Balance** creates movement in adriennes piece, to better show how time passes with the seasons and the how the community changes and copes with life as we move on
 - Asymmetric balance
 - **Lines** help create the right heavy piece
 - **Movement**
- **Balance** is centered in Van Gogh's piece to show how natural and easy it is to age
 - The flowers all balance themselves out and the vase is centered in the painting



Pierluissi, Adrienne. "Spring Poppies 01." *Poppies Four Seasons*, Four Seasons, 2016, poppiesfourseasons.com/paint-14.php.



Van Gogh, Vincent. "Fourteen Sunflowers in a Vase." *The Art Story*, 1888, The National Gallery, London, www.theartstory.org/artist-van-gogh-vincent-artworks.htm

Creation of Meaning in Van Gogh's and Pierluissi's Art

How flowers create theme

Adrienne Pierluissi uses flowers to symbolize community by disrupting the preciousness of art and tapping into the spirit of her neighborhood, while Vincent van Gogh used flowers to symbolize isolation and death by tapping into the horrors of his own mind.

As can be seen to the far right, Adrienne Pierluissi uses **abstract shape** and fast brushstrokes to create **movement** of time using sweeping **texture** to represent flowers and the seasons' toll on them. While flowers are normally seen as delicate little things, Pierluissi exposes the poppies depicted in her piece both in the painting—as shown with the change of seasons—and literally—via the installation of her pieces. Each painting was on either a 3' by 6' or a 4' by 6' canvas, and was installed in a large circle outside; these paintings were exposed to the elements and stood their ground. This created a certain feel of strength in her piece, and by installing the paintings in a circle, that strength was only **emphasized** by the sense of **unity** and community it created.



In Vincent van Gogh's piece, however, the detailed flowers use **contrasting color** to represent isolation and loneliness, and similar **color** to show death. In van Gogh's piece *Iris*, the white iris flower **contrasts** in the sea of blue flowers and disrupts the sense of **unity** and community, creating a lonely tone. The **movement** created in the curving **lines** of the stems of the surrounding flowers help **emphasize** this different flower. This helps the viewer feel awkward and hopeless in a world where they are alone, which is exactly as van Gogh felt.

Although each artist uses flowers as the main subject matter of these pieces, they are used in very different ways: Pierluissi creates **unity** to symbolize community, while van Gogh disrupts **unity** to create isolation.

