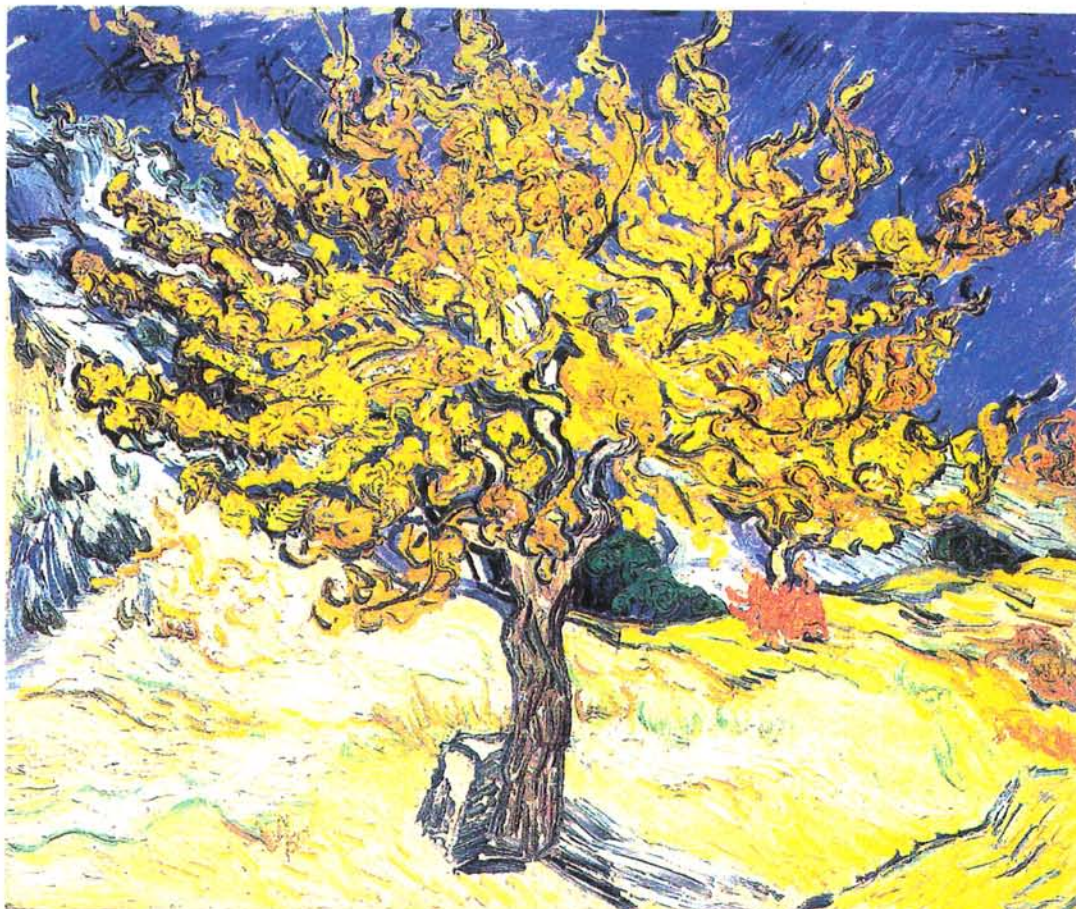


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"The Mulberry Tree," top, "Portrait of the Artist's Mother," left, and "Portrait of a Peasant": giving insights into Van Gogh.



Van Gogh

ART REVIEW



Norton Simon Museum Collection Traces the Inspirations of the Man and the Genius

By SUZANNE MUCHNIC
TIMES ART WRITER

Vincent van Gogh's work amounts to more than a \$53.9-million patch of irises or an \$82.5-million portrait of his doctor—beautiful as those record-making paintings may be. And the Norton Simon Museum's Van Gogh collection consists of more than three late, great paintings—compelling as these works may be.

"Van Gogh: Painter, Printmaker and Collector," at the Norton Simon Museum (to Dec. 30), reminds us of these basic facts in an engaging show of works from the museum's collection, enhanced by photo-

graphs, reproductions and explanatory text. The three prime paintings—"Portrait of the Artist's Mother," "Portrait of a Peasant" and "The Mulberry Tree"—dominate the show by sheer aesthetic force, but they also fit into an investigation of influences on his art.

Visitors who enter the show with a narrow view of Van Gogh as a mythic figure are likely to emerge with the realization that, in many ways, his development was quite ordinary. For one thing, he had heroes whose work he collected and copied. His unique vision was influenced by a wide range of art, from French still lifes to British engravings and Japanese wood-

block prints.

Furthermore, the quintessential mad genius did not create masterpieces the first time he picked up a pencil or brush. Before there were intensely emotional, vibrantly colored artworks, there were stiff drawings and murky paintings. In short, the exhibition brings Van Gogh down to size without diminishing his accomplishments.

Van Gogh never had the means to collect art in a big way, but he had the instinct. From 1873-75, when he lived in London and sold reproductions at the Goupil Gallery, he bought inexpensive popular prints and collected wood engravings by British

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