

PRESS RELEASE

FINDING VAN GOGH – THE STÄDEL PODCAST

In search of the legendary *Portrait of Dr Gachet* / Free of charge in German and English / Available on findingvangogh.com, Spotify, Deezer, Apple and Google Podcasts

#FindingVanGogh

Frankfurt am Main, 19 September 2019. The Städel Museum is presenting its first podcast: **FINDING VAN GOGH**. In five episodes and many voices, the series tells the eventful story of the legendary *Portrait of Dr Gachet* (1890), the last great portrait painting by Vincent van Gogh. In the podcast, the journalist Johannes Nichelmann meets with contemporary witnesses, experts and Van Gogh enthusiasts in Germany, France, London, New York and Switzerland. They talk about the painting's execution, recall its history in the Nazi period and offer first-hand insights into the mechanisms of today's art market. Not least importantly, the podcast examines the question of how an artwork and its artist can become a legend. FINDING VAN GOGH – the Städel's new digital museum education offer – is available free of charge in German and English on findingvangogh.com and all the usual podcast platforms.

“There's hardly another painting that is as shrouded in myth as Van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr Gachet*. What only very few people know is that it was once in the collection of the Städel Museum. With our podcast FINDING VAN GOGH, we'd like to convey the suspenseful story around this masterpiece to a broad public”, says Philipp Demandt, the director of the Städel Museum.

The podcast has been produced in conjunction with the exhibition “MAKING VAN GOGH: A German Love Story” taking place at the Städel Museum from 23 October 2019 to 16 February 2020. The main focus of the presentation will be the emergence of the “Van Gogh legend” around 1900 and the significance of Vincent van Gogh's oeuvre for modern art in Germany. The show will unite more than 120 paintings and works on paper, among them 50 key works by Van Gogh himself from all phases of his career. The painter's early twentieth-century German success story is closely associated with the institution Städel. The Frankfurt museum was in the process of amassing a modern art collection and in that context was among the very first museums to acquire works by van Gogh – including, in 1911, one of his most famous paintings, the *Portrait of Dr Gachet* (1890). It is a likeness of the artist's controversial nerve doctor, whom it portrays with an

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expression full of melancholy and weltschmerz. Van Gogh painted the masterpiece just weeks before taking his own life. The painting, which became the Städel Museum's flagship, marks the interface between the art of the nineteenth-century and classical modernism. It was confiscated by the Nazis in 1937, declared "degenerate art" and sold on the international art market in exchange for foreign currency. The exhibition will present the empty picture frame, which has remained in the museum storeroom to this day.

The *Portrait of Dr Gachet* is an icon – not only of art history but also of the art market. In 1990, it was sold at auction for 82.5 million dollars – at the time the highest price ever paid for an artwork. Since then, the painting has never again been on view to the public. Today it is in a private collection.

Podcast – The Episodes

Episode 1: The Missing Neurologist, 44:47 min

Johannes and the curator Alexander Eiling are standing in the Städel Museum's storage room – in front of an empty picture frame. It is the frame that once held the *Portrait of Dr Gachet*, which was in the Städel collection until 1937. The museum made protracted efforts to obtain the painting as a loan for its upcoming Van Gogh exhibition – in vain. Instead, the empty picture frame will serve in the show as a reminder of the work's breath-taking history. The tale begins in Auvers-sur-Oise, a small town outside Paris. It is there that Van Gogh paints the portrait of his doctor just a few weeks before committing suicide. How is the painting linked to Van Gogh's own biography? What makes it a masterwork?

Narrators: Alexander Eiling, Cynthia Saltzman, Dominique Janssens

Episode 2: "Degenerate Art", 34:54 min

Frankfurt, 1905. At the age of 30, Georg Swarzenski is appointed director of the Städel. He wants to open the richly traditional museum for exciting new art. In 1911, he purchases the *Portrait of Dr Gachet* in Paris – an act that makes a strong statement in the unyielding German Empire. Swarzenski very skilfully develops the Städel into a modern museum. In 1933, however, when he is at the height of his career, the Third Reich descends upon him. Swarzenski is of Jewish descent, but it is not only he as a person who is under existential threat: his life work, the modern collection, is also a target of attack. The *Portrait of Dr Gachet*, the silent observer of all these goings-on, is confiscated in 1937 and declared "degenerate art". This is a chapter in the painting's history that bears testimony to the brutal and contradictory ideology of the National Socialists – and to the importance they attached to art.

Narrators: Alexander Eiling, Andreas Hansert, Anna Huber

Episode 3: Genius and Madness, 32:36 min

The *Portrait of Dr Gachet* is in storage in a granary in Berlin along with thousands of other confiscated artworks. Here it comes to the attention of one of the leading National Socialists: Hermann Göring wants to turn it into foreign currency. By a circuitous route, the work finds its way into the possession of a Jewish family in Amsterdam who are compelled to flee the Nazis themselves a short time later. The *Portrait of Dr Gachet* goes to New York with them. There it not only witnesses how times change, but also how the image of Van Gogh evolves: Is there any truth in the myth of the mad genius? Can Van Gogh's art be separated from his biography?

Narrators: Gottfried Boehm, Konstanze Crüwell, Ewald Rathke, Cynthia Saltzman, Iris Schmeisser

Episode 4: Gachet's Farewell, 37:19 min

The *Portrait of Dr Gachet* has meanwhile changed owners thirteen times – and is now writing art market history. How does it come about: the historical auction where the painting breaks all the price records? Johannes travels to Christie's London to meet with Christopher Burge, the auctioneer who auctioned the portrait in 1990. Burge recounts how not only the prices, but also something else altogether, exploded in New York at the time. What path has the international art market taken since then?

Narrators: Giovanna Bertazzoni, Dirk Boll, Christopher Burge, Stefan Koldehoff, David Nash

Episode 5: Private Matters, 30:36 min

Where is the *Portrait of Dr Gachet* now? Since the historical auction in 1990, the artwork has never been on view to the public again. In New York, Johannes Nichelmann comes surprisingly close to the work's present owner.

Narrators: Konstanze Crüwell, Alexander Eiling, Stefan Koldehoff, David Nash, Cynthia Saltzman

All episodes and more information on the podcast: findingvangogh.com

FINDING VAN GOGH: In search of the legendary *Portrait of Dr Gachet*

German URL: findingvangogh.de

English URL: findingvangogh.com

About podcasts: A podcast is a subscribable audio file that is accessible free of charge. It can be listened to on demand, most commonly by a podcast app.

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Protagonists:

Giovanna Bertazzoni (London), director of the international department of Impressionist and modern art at Christie's London

Gottfried Boehm (Basel), art historian, philosopher and professor emeritus of the University of Basel

Dirk Boll (London), president of Christie's for the regions Europe, the Near East, Russia and Africa

Christopher Burge (London), former chairman of Christie's New York and auctioneer at the auction of the *Portrait of Dr Gachet* in 1990

Konstanze Crüwell (Frankfurt am Main), journalist (*FAZ*) and author

Alexander Eiling (Frankfurt am Main), head of the Städel Museum's collection of modern art and curator of the exhibition MAKING VAN GOGH

Andreas Hansert (Frankfurt am Main), historian and sociologist

Anna Huber (Frankfurt am Main), art historian in the Städel Museum's museum education department

Dominique Janssens (Auvers-sur-Oise), owner of the Auberge Ravoux and founder of the Institut Van Gogh

Stefan Koldehoff (Cologne), journalist, art market and Van Gogh expert

David Nash (New York), formerly Sotheby's, today gallerist in New York

Johannes Nichelmann (Berlin), free-lance reporter, author and moderator for public broadcasting, radio and television

Ewald Rathke (Frankfurt am Main), art historian and art dealer

Cynthia Saltzman (New York), art historian, art dealer and author of *The Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, 1998

Iris Schmeisser (Frankfurt am Main), head of provenance research and the historical archive at the Städel Museum

FINDING VAN GOGH is a production of the Städel Museum in collaboration with Johannes Nichelmann and Jakob Schmidt. The podcast is available in German and English.

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All information: findingvangogh.com



All information on the exhibition “MAKING VAN GOGH: A German Love Story”:

staedelmuseum.de/en

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