

MoMA FINDS SECRET MESSAGE BENEATH THE STARRY NIGHT

by Staff Writer

During routine maintenance of *The Starry Night* (1889) by Vincent van Gogh, chief curator Lee Alexander at the Museum of Modern Art noticed something beneath the famous painting's vibrant night sky. "It looked like words hidden in the swirls, circles, and orbs," he said, and sent the painting for diagnostic imaging to learn more. Early results reveal that there are indeed words beneath the layers of paint—five lines of what appears to be poetry, written in English. This comes as a surprise to historians, as most of van Gogh's letters are written in French or Dutch. "It's yet another mystery about van Gogh, his life, and work," said Alexander. The art world has long puzzled over many aspects of van Gogh's life and death, including a portrait of an unknown woman discovered hidden in the floorboards of room number five at the hotel Auberge Ravoux, Auvers-sur-Oise, France, where van Gogh died of a gunshot wound. The artist reportedly carried the portrait with him everywhere in the last years of his life, speaking to it as if it were a living being. Who was the subject, for what purpose was



The Starry Night by Vincent van Gogh

it painted, and why was the portrait concealed? Alexander suggested that the new information revealed by *The Starry Night* might provide vital clues to help answer these and other key questions. *The Starry Night* will undergo more extensive imaging, including handwriting analysis, to confirm that van Gogh was the one who painted the words on the canvas. Simultaneously, scholars specializing in 19th-

century literature are combing archives worldwide to determine the origin of the poetry. More information will be made public as soon as it is available.



Some Starry Night
by Irene Latham