

# SUNFLOWERS BY SHERAMY BUNDRICK



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From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In a knockout debut novel, art historian Bundrick (*Music and Image in Classical Athens*) brings Vincent Van Gogh's paintings and personal story to vibrant life. While Bundrick takes many liberties (recorded in an author's note) in her fictionalized account of Van Gogh's affair with her narrator, fille de maison Rachel Courteau, she gives Rachel such a believable voice that the proceedings seem genuine. At 35, Van Gogh meets lovable spitfire Rachel while surreptitiously sketching her in a garden. Having taken refuge in an Arles brothel after the death of her parents, Rachel greets Van Gogh as a customer not long after, and soon feelings blossom between them. Visiting friend Paul Gauguin and the cloud of Van Gogh's madness undercut the couple's bliss, as do financial troubles and Rachel's life at the maison, where she's kept a virtual prisoner. While infusing well-known historical moments (like Van Gogh's infamous self-mutilation) with vivid details, humanizing Van Gogh and putting his famous works in context, Bundrick generates an impressive volume of suspense, delight and heartbreak. (Oct.)

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Review

Sheramy Bundrick, an art historian writing her first novel, is up to the task. She conjures a poignant but ill-fated romance in 1888 Arles, France, between the mentally fragile painter and an obscure historical figure, a prostitute named Rachel. Fans of *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, take note.

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# SUNFLOWERS BY SHERAMY BUNDRICK PDF

A novel of Vincent Van Gogh, Sheramy Bundrick's *Sunflowers* is an arresting and beautiful tale of a young French prostitute's passionate, doomed relationship with a troubled artist. Vividly evoking a bygone time and place, Bundrick brings her characters to breathtaking life as she seamlessly blends historical fact with riveting speculation. A story that will captivate readers of Susan Vreeland and Karen Essex, and admirers of Tracy Chevalier's New York Times bestseller *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Sheramy Bundrick's exceptional debut, *Sunflowers*, will linger long in the mind like a breathtaking landscape or an exquisite portrait done in oils.

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Most helpful customer reviews

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

The Color Yellow, the color of Madness

By ArtLover

Sheramy Bundrick's first novel based on art history is a gem of a book. "Sunflowers" is the story of Vincent Van Gogh's last 2 years of life as seen through the eyes of his Arlesienne prostitute lover, Rachel Courtreau.

Ms. Bundrick, an art historian at a Florida University, has taken the facts of Van Gogh's tortured life and woven them with beautiful descriptions of the time, place and people he painted. As if this information wasn't enough to base her novel on, Ms. Bundrick takes us inside the artist's head through his "imagined but possible" conversations with M. Roulin, Dr's Rey and Peyron, M. Trabuc, and others who featured in Van Gogh's brightly colored canvases. What caused Van Gogh's madness??? Was he bi-polar? Did he suffer from epilepsy? Did he feel the constant pressure to paint and be understood like all artists do? One can only imagine....

Rachel's part as Van Gogh's love interest, serves a dual purpose of "setting the scene". Through her story, we see the beautiful colors of the South of France, the artist's process, the weather, the festivals, the town of Arles as Van Gogh would have seen it, and what a woman's life was like if and when fate intervened.

A great way to enjoy this book even further would be to have an art book on hand that features Van Gogh's paintings.

17 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Sappy love story, sheds light on madness and creativity

By K. Steinberg

I picked up this book because I enjoy historical fiction, the lives of creative geniuses, and severe mental illness. I think the author brought light to the topic of madness and creativity, how the two went hand-in-hand for Van Gogh, and illustrating the devastating effect the episodes ("crise") must have had on his personal relationships and his art. The author also does a very nice job of describing the places, sights, smells, sounds, and colors of the world of Vincent Van Gogh in the last two years of his life.

Unfortunately the love story for me was just a bit too sappy, but then I'm not a big romance reader. The love story didn't seem very sophisticated. I also found some of the characters a bit unbelievable--especially Dr. Rey, who is supposed to be very nice and normal, but his reaction to Rachel seems extremely naive considering that he is supposed to be a full-grown man who had gone through college and medical school. I did appreciate that even though the heroine was a prostitute there were no detailed graphic descriptions of sex, which I think would have detracted from the beauty of the book.

Overall, I found the sappiness of the love story distracting, but the author's loving description of the art and the way she makes the places and times come alive made the book enjoyable.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

A nice first outing for a new author

By Misfit

First time author and art historian Sheramy Bundrick takes a character who is a mere footnote in history - a prostitute by the name of Rachel was presented with Vincent Van Gogh's severed ear by the artist himself - and spins an artful (pun intended) tale around what-might-have-been. Told from the first person POV, Rachel awakes from a nap in a city garden to find a odd gentleman sketching her - and a new friendship begins that quickly turns to love - although Rachel's love is strongly tested when Vincent begins displaying bouts of madness and he is hospitalized and eventually taken away from Arles and Rachel. Can their love survive? Can Vincent overcome his madness and marry her? If you don't want to know the answers before reading the book stay off the internet.

Outside of a few minor quibbles, I found this was a very entertaining, albeit a quick and light read (heh, after

Wolf Hall anything would be light and easy). I'm not terribly fond of the first person narrative, although it did work well here, especially seeing Rachel's reactions to Vincent's madness as well as to his paintings (nicely done), but it did box the author in when she had to use \*letters\* between Rachel and Vincent later in the book. There was more black and white in some characters than I care to see (argh! the prostitutes with the heart of gold), and perhaps some of the language (especially the cursing) was a bit too modern. Although I haven't a clue how any Frenchman (in this century or the last) swears so what do I know? Rachel seemed to have a touch too much freedom, both coming and going from the brothel as well as when Vincent was in the asylum - but those are all minor nits on an otherwise engaging tale.

A big thumbs up on the author's notes telling us what is known and what was not as well as when she \*fudged\* a date or two to make her story work. I like to see that - now if Ms. "historical entertainment" could learn to do that. This is a solid first entry into the historical fiction field and I look forward to who or what she'll write about next - love the art angle and want to see more.

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