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THE BLOG

Chasing Van Gogh's Dream

11/30/2011 04:37 pm ET | Updated Jan 30, 2012

- [Christian Josi](#) Atlanta based Columnist

Pixels aren't ink, a screen isn't paper, and an app will never be a book — nor a wholly suitable replacement for one in my world, at least. That said, “Van Gogh's Dream”, a newly-released app from Mnestra, takes digital publishing and its stunning multimedia potential to a level I've not yet seen.

Fouzi Louahem, Loic Sander and Wouter van der Veen — armed with equal parts passion, skill, and knowledge — spent an estimated 1200 hours building, designing and writing the app. All are well aware of where they come from: Strasbourg, where Gutenberg invented in the mid-15th century a series of techniques that redefined the art of printing and subsequently changed the world. Knowledge became accessible to all and endlessly reproducible. As knowledge is power, Gutenberg enabled power to the people.

I'm not suggesting Van Gogh's Dream will change the world quite as drastically, but it can change the way we look at the possibilities offered by digital tablets. Until now, we've seen a lot of sensational, 3D HD interactive multimedia gadget filled apps, produced by developers who seem to rivalize exclusively in the domain of getting as much out of the technical specifications of the iPad as possible. Van Gogh's Dream takes the very opposite direction. The most important feature is its simplicity, its subdued graphics, its rare and well-dosed interactive features. It uses the iPad's stunning possibilities when it makes sense and when it serves the content. Subtly. Beautifully. Much like the work featured within.

The app was conceived by this passionate crew as a way to help the Institut Van Gogh, a non-profit organization founded by Dominique-Charles Janssens, to realize Van Gogh's ultimate dream.

In June 1890, a few weeks before Vincent drew his last breath (having two days earlier suffered a gunshot wound to the stomach) in room #5 at the spartan Auberge Ravoux in Auvers-sur-Oise France, the famous painter wrote the following to his brother Theo: 'One day or another, I believe I will find a way to have an exhibition of my own in a café.'

Janssens has dedicated his career to fulfilling this modest wish. For the last 27 years, he has painstakingly restored Van Gogh's last abode, opened it to over 1.2 million visitors from all over the world, preserved its neighborhood just as it was during Vincent's time there, and created within one of the best small restaurants in all of France.

Most importantly to Janssens, he has relentlessly worked at convincing the world that there should be an original Van Gogh painting in the very room where it once dried and in the very town where he lies buried in a small cemetery next to his beloved Brother Theo. Recently dubbed 'one of the most enchanting people I have ever met' by tech evangelist Guy Kawasaki in his new book *Enchantment*, rest for Janssens is not an option until Van Gogh's dream is realized.

"Van Gogh's Dream", the app, was developed within the spirit of Janssens' endeavor: enable Van Gogh enthusiasts to discover or rediscover the artist's life and work in a user-friendly fashion, with verified, convincing information (no weird or distorted theories about his ear, his suicide or the children he might have had, blah blah blah) and beautiful reproductions.

To review the app is to feel as if one is being taken seriously by its creators. In addition to the full catalog of his last 80 paintings (painted in less than 70 days), a broad scope of complementary topics are presented, such as Van Gogh in motion pictures, his Technique, his last letter, his Legacy, and some wonderful images of the modern-day Auberge Ravoux, Auvers-sur-

Oise, and clips of the world's premier Van Gogh experts expounding on their special subject.

It's a full immersion in Van Gogh's universe, brought by people who love Vincent's art for what is truly is: the result of a life of hard work, of talent, of erudition and love for mankind. As is anticipates human finesse and good taste, who knows if it will provide the Institut Van Gogh with the means to purchase 'one day or another' a Van Gogh painting, but it sure isn't going to hurt the cause.