



The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries,
Borinage, 1888-1890

Works Collected by Theo and Vincent van Gogh

The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage

Eugène Boch

The dark smoke billowing from tall chimneys betrays the violence done at the Crachet-Picquery mine in Frameries, in the Borinage region of Belgium, where miners risked their lives extracting coal hundreds of metres underground. Established in the late eighteenth century, the mine belonged to La Compagnie des Charbonnages Belges. ⁰¹ As evidenced in this painting, this region was characterized by the coal industry: more factory chimneys and a coal heap dot the horizon. Despite the harsh, perilous work inside the mines, the painting presents a serene scene with soft tones and a balanced composition. Through the strong horizontal orientation and the cropping of the canvas on either side, the mine in this painting almost blends into the landscape, while the miners and their hardships remain unseen.

Boch and Van Gogh

Created around 1888–90, this scene was painted by Eugène Boch (1855–1941), who was born in Saint-Vaast in Belgium. While he learned to paint in Belgium and the Netherlands, he moved to Paris in 1879. There, he studied under Léon Bonnat (1833–1922) for a few years before apprenticing with Fernand Cormon (1845–1924), at the same time as other artists such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) and Emile Bernard (1868–1941).⁰² Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) also came to study at Cormon's atelier in 1886, but there is no evidence that the two were acquainted then. They may have met at the gatherings of the Peintres du Petit Boulevard, although Boch was very absorbed in his work during that period and had limited social interactions.⁰³ What is certain is that Boch and Van Gogh crossed paths two years later when the American painter Dodge MacKnight (1860–1950), who was then working with Boch in the small Provencal town of Fontvieille in 1888, took him to nearby Arles to visit Van Gogh. MacKnight unquestionably knew Van Gogh through Cormon's atelier, and he had described him to Boch as 'a remarkable character (eccentric), but a good fellow'.⁰⁴ Van Gogh was immediately drawn to the Belgian: 'He's a lad whose outward appearance I like very much. Face like the blade of a razor, green eyes, and distinction with all that.'⁰⁵ They had extensive discussions about the new directions in art and quickly became friends.⁰⁶ When MacKnight set off, leaving Boch behind with Van Gogh, Van Gogh did not mind; he thought MacKnight was a slacker and that at least the Belgian painter 'knows what he wants'.⁰⁷

It was Van Gogh who advised Boch to paint miners in the Borinage area of his own homeland.⁰⁸ Boch took this to heart and after leaving Arles travelled to the Borinage, working there between 1888 and 1891. Only a few paintings from this period are still known, including *Coal Mine* (fig. 1) . Like the canvas in the Van Gogh Museum, this painting portrays smoky factory chimneys, but in gloomier tones and a looser style. *The Red Roofs* (fig. 2) – which prompted Théo van Rysselberghe (1862–1926) to invite Boch to exhibit at Les XX in 1890 – depicts the modest cottages where miners lived.⁰⁹ Similar to *The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage*, Boch depicted the miners' surroundings in these works, rather than the workers themselves.



Eugène Boch, *The Red Roofs*,
1888–90, oil on canvas, 66 × 91
cm, private collection

Art exchange

In 1890, the Van Gogh brothers acquired *The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage* through an exchange of paintings. Theo (1857–1891) brokered the swap: ‘I have something to write to you which I think will give you pleasure,’ he informed Vincent. ‘Yesterday I was first at the Salon with Boch [...] after which we saw your paintings. He likes them very much, and it seems to me that he understands them. As you had said that you would willingly do an exchange with him [...] I told him that he could take that one in exchange for a painting of his.’¹⁰ Theo got to choose a work in Boch’s studio, and this canvas soon caught his eye. Theo enthusiastically described the painting to his brother: ‘the whole factory is in smoke and steam and stands out darkly with very bright reflections of the sun on one side against the green wheat. The sky is very luminous.’¹¹ In exchange, Theo gave Boch *Mountains at Saint-Rémy* (fig. 3). Already in October 1888, in a letter to Boch, Van Gogh had expressed his desire to exchange a work for one that Boch was going to make in the Borinage.¹²

In his description of Boch’s painting, Theo praised both ‘the subject and the intention of what [Boch] wanted to do’, acknowledging that it was ‘neither very skilful nor powerful’ but ‘very sincere, like the fellow himself’.¹³ This aligned with Van Gogh’s earlier remarks about Boch’s work; he found the lineation in Boch’s paintings ‘poor’ but thought that the colour was ‘already beginning to be lively’.¹⁴ However, Boch’s omission of the hard labour and humble existence of the miners was at odds with Van Gogh’s emphasis on depicting the ‘authentic’ lives of peasants and the destitute in his work. Boch’s rather clean lines and smooth brushwork – with occasional instances of freehand-painted smoke and fire from the chimneys and even some impasto in a plume of smoke on the right – also imparted a somewhat idealized quality to the painting. Possibly Vincent and Theo missed the ‘raw’ aspect of life in the Borinage in this work by Boch. Nonetheless, Vincent was pleased with the exchange, referring to it as ‘very good’.¹⁵ Whether he ever saw the work in person remains unknown; he visited Theo in Paris shortly after the swap but died later the same month.



Vincent van Gogh, *Mountains at Saint-Rémy*, 1889, oil on canvas, 72.8 × 92 cm, New York, Guggenheim, Thannhauser Collection, Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser, 1978

Van Gogh and the Borinage

His stylistic and technical reservations notwithstanding, Theo had good reason to select this particular work for his brother. The Borinage held a special place in Vincent's heart. Just before deciding to pursue drawing and painting as his profession in 1880, Van Gogh had lived among the miners of the Borinage, working as an evangelist.¹⁶ Vincent's time there proved challenging. His polite French was not understood by the local Walloon Borains, and vice versa. The miners distrusted this Dutch young man from the middle class. Moreover, he was not a strong orator, and as a preacher he attracted little attention.¹⁷ He longed for his days at the Goupil & Cie art dealership, saying to Theo, 'I often feel homesick for the land of paintings.'¹⁸ In response, Theo encouraged him to embark on an actual artistic journey, and it was in the Borinage that Van Gogh took his first steps in this direction. His earliest drawings as an artist originated there, although he mentioned to Boch in 1888 that he had destroyed most of the work from that period.¹⁹ One of the surviving drawings created in this place is *Coke Factory in the Borinage* (fig. 4), featuring a factory near the Crachet-Picquery mine. Therefore, it is no wonder that Theo chose *The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage*; it would remind his brother of his own path towards artisthood.

Despite the hardships he had faced there, it was Van Gogh who encouraged Boch to work in the Borinage. In the descriptions he provided to the Belgian painter, there is no hint of the difficulties he himself had encountered in that place. He spoke highly of the Borinage, saying, 'I so much love that sad region of the Borinage, which will always be unforgettable to me.'²⁰ Were he to travel north again, he wrote, he would like to visit Boch. 'In short, it was in the Borinage that I began to work from nature for the first time. [...] But it touches my heart that in the end, all these places are going to be painted.'²¹ Additionally, he was curious whether Anna Boch (1848-1936), Eugène's sister, would also paint the coal mines; after all, there was plenty of subject matter for two artists.²²



Vincent van Gogh, *Coke Factory in the Borinage*, 1879, pencil and watercolour on paper, 26.4 × 37.5 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Looking back

Van Gogh had painted a portrait of Boch in Arles in the late summer of 1888. His appreciation for the Belgian artist is evident in his descriptions of the work, both before and after painting it. He wrote about 'my love that I have for him' and wanted to capture the artist 'who dreams great dreams, who works as the nightingale sings, because that's his nature'.²³ He placed Boch against a marine-blue starry sky (fig. 5). Van Gogh titled it *Eugène Boch (The Poet)* and displayed it in the Yellow House - it can be seen in the initial version of *The Bedroom* (1888, Van Gogh Museum).²⁴ Eugène Boch and his sister Anna were among the first to appreciate Van Gogh's work. Anna was one of the few to purchase one of Van Gogh's paintings during his lifetime, *The Red Vineyard* (1888, Pushkin Museum), for 400 francs.²⁵ Subsequent to the exchange with *The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage*, Vincent wrote to Theo about it, saying, 'I'm pleased that Boch is doing this exchange with me, for I thought that, relatively, they'd paid a little too much for the other canvas, being friends.'²⁶ After Theo's death, his widow, Jo van Gogh-Bonger (1862-1925), gifted Boch *Eugène Boch (The Poet)*. Thanking her, Boch wrote, 'I do not know how to tell you, madam, how deeply moved I am by your gift and how much pleasure I derive from it. It is a beautiful work of art, but above all, a memento of Vincent, whom I knew in Arles. I keep remembering the good moments we spent together there. Enthusiastically, for art! For pure art! That is my only thought about your brother-in-law.'²⁷

Nina Reid
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[↗ doi.org/10.58802/NANQ1964](https://doi.org/10.58802/NANQ1964)

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Object details

The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage

Artist

Eugène Boch (1855 - 1941)

Location

Frameries

Date

1888-1890

Medium

oil on canvas

Dimensions

56 cm x 78 cm

Inscriptions

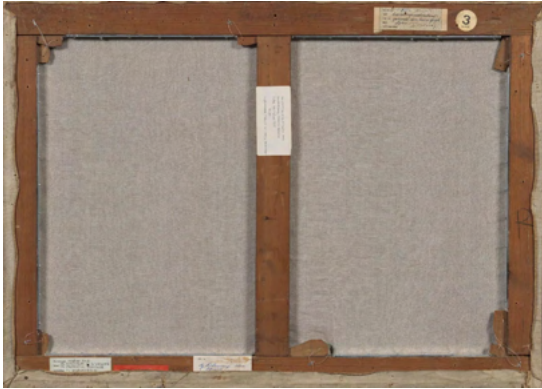
E. Boch

Inventory Number

s0209V1962

Credits

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)



The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage

Front & Back



Provenance

The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage

Exchanged by the artist with Theo van Gogh, Paris, 22 June 1890; after his death on 25 January 1891, inherited by his widow, Jo van Gogh-Bonger, and their son, Vincent Willem van Gogh, Paris; administered until her death on 2 September 1925 by Jo van Gogh-Bonger, Bussum/Amsterdam/Laren; transferred by Vincent Willem van Gogh, Laren, to the Vincent van Gogh Foundation, Amsterdam, 10 July 1962; agreement concluded between the Vincent van Gogh Foundation and the State of the Netherlands, in which the preservation and management of the collection, and its placing in the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, to be realized in Amsterdam, is entrusted to the State, 21 July 1962; on permanent loan to the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh from the opening of the museum on 2 June 1973, and at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, since 1 July 1994.



Exhibitions

The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage

Mons, Museum voor Schoone Kunsten, *Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). Son art et ses amis*, 22 March-5 May 1958, no. 84, *Paysage de borinage*

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, February 1960, no. 16, *De kolenmijn van l'Agrappe te Fromeries-Borinage*

Otterlo, Kröller-Müller Museum, *Collectie Theo van Gogh*, April-May 1960, no. 16, *De kolenmijn van l'Agrappe te Fromeries-Borinage*

Paris, Institut Néerlandais, *Les amis de Van Gogh*, 9 November-17 December 1960, no. 28, *La mine de l'Agrappe de Frameries, Borinage*

Saarbrücken, Saarlandmuseum, Moderne Galerie, *Anna Boch und Eugène Boch. Werke aus den Anfängen der modernen Kunst*, 6 May-6 June 1971, no. 70, *Kohlengruben von Crachet-Picry*

Mons, Museum voor Schoone Kunsten, *Van Gogh et la Belgique*, 3 October-30 November 1980, no. 65, *La mine de l'Agrappe à Frameries. Borinage ou L'usine de Crachet-Pecry*

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Theo van Gogh 1857-1891. Kunsthandelaar, verzamelaar en broer van Vincent*, 24 June-5 September 1999, no. 169, *De Crachet-Pecry mijn, Borinage*

Paris, Musée d'Orsay, *Theo van Gogh 1857-1891. Marchand de tableaux, collectionneur, frère de Vincent*, 27 September 1999-9 January 2000, no. 169, *La mine de Crachet-Pecry, Borinage*

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *De noodzaak tot schrijven*, 28 June-6 October 2002

Amsterdam, Van Gogh Museum, *Van Goghs brieven. De kunstenaar aan het woord*, 9 October 2009-3 January 2010

Mons, BAM Beaux-Arts Mons, *Van Gogh in de Borinage. De
geboorte van een kunstenaar*, 25 January-17 May 2015



Literature

The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage

- Gérald Schurr, *Les petits maîtres de la peinture: valeur de demain: 1820-1920*, 7 vols., Paris 1975-89, vol. 7 (1989), pp. 163-64
- Ronald de Leeuw, *Van Gogh Museum: Paintings and Pastels*, Zwolle 1994, p. 99
- Anonymous, *Les amis de Van Gogh*, exh. cat., Paris (Institut Néerlandais) 1960, no. 28, p. 27
- Thérèse Faider-Thomas, *Anna Boch und Eugène Boch: Werke aus den Anfängen der modernen Kunst*, exh. cat., Saarbrücken (Saarlandmuseum) 1971, no. 70, pp. 55, 62
- A. M. Hammacher and Gisele Ollinger-Zinque, *Van Gogh en Belgique*, exh. cat., Mons (Musée des Beaux-Arts Mons) 1980, no. 65, pp. 118-19
- Evert van Uitert and Michael Hoyle, *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam 1987, no. 1.25, p. 3
- Chris Stolwijk and Richard Thomson (eds.), with a contribution by Sjraar van Heugten, *Theo van Gogh, 1857-1891: Art Dealer, Collector and Brother of Vincent*, exh. cat., Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum) / Paris (Musée d'Orsay), Amsterdam & Zwolle 1999, no. 169, pp. 163, 167-68
- Pierre Cabanne and Gérald Schurr, *Dictionnaire des petits maîtres de la peinture, 1820-1920*, Paris 2003, pp. 163-64
- Ron Dirven, *Boch & Van Gogh*, Zundert and Schiedam 2010, pp. 20-23, 55
- Sjraar van Heugten (ed.), *Van Gogh in de Borinage: de geboorte van een kunstenaar*, exh. cat., Mons (Musée des Beaux-Arts Mons), Brussels 2015, p. 18
- Sjraar van Heugten et al., *Van Goghs intimi: vrienden, familie, modellen*, exh. cat., 's-

Hertogenbosch (Noordbrabants Museum),
Zwolle 2019, no. 70, p. 93



Letters

The Mine Crachet-Picquery in Frameries, Borinage

- Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, Paris, 23 June 1890, [↗ 890](#)
- Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Auvers-sur-Oise, 24 June 1890, [↗ 891](#)

Figures



Fig. 1

Eugène Boch, *Coal Mine*, 1891, oil on canvas, 98 × 153 cm, private collection



Fig. 2

Eugène Boch, *The Red Roofs*, 1888-90, oil on canvas, 66 × 91 cm, private collection



Fig. 3

Vincent van Gogh, *Mountains at Saint-Rémy*, 1889, oil on canvas, 72.8 × 92 cm, New York, Guggenheim, Thannhauser Collection, Gift, Justin K. Thannhauser, 1978



Fig. 4

Vincent van Gogh, *Coke Factory in the Borinage*, 1879, pencil and watercolour on paper, 26.4 × 37.5 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

**Fig. 5**

Vincent van Gogh, *Eugène Boch (The Poet)*, 1888, oil on canvas, 60.3 × 45.4 cm, Paris, Musée d'Orsay. Photo: RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Adrien Didierjean

Footnotes

- 01 Sjaar van Heugten (ed.), *Van Gogh in de Borinage: de geboorte van een kunstenaar*, exh. cat., Mons (Musée des Beaux-Arts Mons), Brussels 2015, p. 142.
- 02 Anonymous, *Les amis de Van Gogh*, exh. cat., Paris (Institut Néerlandais) 1960, n.p.
- 03 Thérèse Faider-Thomas, *Anna Boch und Eugène Boch: Werke aus den Anfängen der modernen Kunst*, exh. cat., Saarbrücken (Saarlandmuseum) 1971, p.p 46, 48.
- 04 Dodge MacKnight, letter to Eugene Boch, 17 April 1888, quoted in Ron Dirven, *Boch & Van Gogh*, Zundert and Schiedam 2010, p. 47.
- 05 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 8 or 9 July 1888 [↗ \[637\]](#): 'C'est un garçon dont l'extérieur me plait beaucoup. figure en lame de rasoir, yeux verts, avec cela de la distinction.'
- 06 Dirven 2010, p. 47.
- 07 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, on or around 26 August 1888 [↗ \[669\]](#): 'Ah - Macknight has cleared off at last - I don't regret it in the least. His pal the Belgian didn't seem greatly saddened by it either when he came yesterday to tell me about it, and we spent the evening together. He's very reasonable in his ideas, and knows what he wants, at least' ('Ah - Mac Knight a enfin décampé - je ne le regrette point. Son copain le belge n'en paraissait pas fort attristé pas non plus lorsqu'il est venu hier me le raconter et que nous avons passé la soirée ensemble. Il est très raisonnable dans ses idées et sait au moins ce qu'il veut'); and Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, Arles, 3 September 1888 [↗ \[673\]](#): 'He's going to stay with Macknight again for reasons of living more cheaply. That, though, has a disadvantage for him, I believe, because living with an idler makes you idle' ('Lui va encore rester avec Mac Knight pour raisons de vivre à meilleur marché. Cela a je crois pour lui pourtant un désavantage car vivre avec un fainéant rend fainéant').
- 08 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Eugène Boch, 2 October 1888 [↗ \[693\]](#).
- 09 Dirven 2010, p. 49.
- 10 Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 23 June 1890 [↗ \[890\]](#): 'J'ai à t'écrire quelque chose qui je pense te fera plaisir. Hier j'ai été d'abord au Salon avec Bock qui est venu ensuite déjeuner après quoi nous avons vu tes tableaux. Il les aime beaucoup et il m'a l'air de les comprendre. Comme tu avais dit que tu ferais volontiers un échange avec lui [...] je lui ai dit qu'il pouvait prendre celle là en échange d'un tableau de lui.'
- 11 Ibid.: 'toute la fabrique est dans la fumée & la vapeur & se détache en sombre avec des reflets de soleils très vifs sur un côté contre les blés verts. Le ciel est très lumineux.'
- 12 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Eugène Boch, 2 October 1888 [↗ \[693\]](#).

- 13 Theo van Gogh, letter to Vincent van Gogh, 23 June 1890 [↗ \[890\]](#): 'I think that above all the subject and the intention of what he wanted to do are remarkable. It's neither very skilful nor powerful, but very sincere, like the fellow himself.' ('Je trouve que surtout le motif & l'intention de ce qu'il a voulu faire sont remarquables. Ce n'est pas très habile ni puissant, mais très sincère, comme le garçon lui-même.')
- 14 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 4 September 1888 [↗ \[674\]](#): 'You'll probably see his two paintings that he's bringing; the drawing in them is poor, but the colour is already beginning to be lively' ('Tu verras probablement ses deux tableaux qu'il apporte, le dessin en est faible mais la couleur commence déjà à être vivante').
- 15 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 24 June 1890 [↗ \[891\]](#): 'The exchange you made with Boch is very good, and am very curious to see what sort of thing he's making at present' ('L'échange que tu as fait avec Bocka est très bien et suis bien curieux de voir comment il fait à présent').
- 16 Van Heugten 2015, p. 14.
- 17 Ibid., p. 16.
- 18 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, between about 22 and 24 June 1880 [↗ \[155\]](#): 'And I don't repent it, and now, far from the country again, I often feel homesick for the country of paintings' ('Et je ne m'en repens pas, et maintenant encore loin du pays, j'ai souvent le mal du pays pour le pays des tableaux').
- 19 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Eugène Boch, 2 October 1888 [↗ \[693\]](#).
- 20 Ibid.: 'Because everything you do will be of extraordinary interest to me, since I so much love that sad region of the Borinage, which will always be unforgettable to me' ('Car tout ce que vous ferez va m'intéresser extraordinairement puisque j'aime tellement ce triste pays du Borinage qui toujours me sera inoubliable').
- 21 Ibid.: 'C'est en somme dans le Borinage que j'ai pour la première fois commencé à travailler sur nature. [...] Mais cela me remue le coeur qu'enfin tous ces endroits vont être peints.'
- 22 Ibid.: 'Is your sister also going to do miners? There's certainly work for two people there. I believe that it's very fortunate for you that the two of you both do painting in your house.' ('Est ce que votre soeur va faire les charbonniers aussi. Il y a bien là du travail pour deux. J'estime qu'il soit bien heureux pour vous que vous soyez à deux pour faire de la peinture dans votre maison.')
- 23 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 18 August 1888 [↗ \[663\]](#): 'I'd like to put in the painting my appreciation, my love that I have for him' ('Je voudrai mettre dans le tableau mon appréciation, mon amour que j'ai pour lui'); Ibid.: 'I'd like to do the portrait of an artist friend who dreams great dreams, who works as the nightingale sings, because that's his nature' ('Je voudrai faire le portrait d'un ami artiste qui rêve de grands rêves, qui travaille comme le rossignol chante parceque c'est ainsi sa nature'); and Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 3 September 1888 [↗ \[673\]](#).
- 24 Dirven 2010, p. 13.
- 25 Ibid., p. 25.

- 26 Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, 24 June 1890 [↗ \[891\]](#): 'Je suis content de ce que Bock me fait cet échange car je trouvais qu'ils avaient bien payé un peu cher relativement l'autre toile étant des amis.'
- 27 Eugène Boch, letter to Jo van Gogh-Bonger, 22 July 1891, quoted in Dirven 2010, p. 13: 'Ik weet niet hoe ik u moet vertellen, mevrouw, hoezeer ik geraakt ben door uw cadeau en hoeveel genoeg ik er van ondervind: het is een mooi kunstwerk, maar bovenal een souvenir aan Vincent, die ik gekend heb in Arles. Ik herinner me steeds weer de goede momenten die we daar samen hebben doorgebracht. Vol enthousiasme, voor de kunst! Voor zuivere kunst! Dat is mijn enige gedachte aan uw schoonbroer.'